

Choosing Confrontation

Democratization as a Cause of the First Russo-Chechen War

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Abstract

In 1994 a war broke out between Russia and Chechnya, and the purpose of this thesis is to investigate the following: Was the democratization process a cause of the war? The analysis applies a theory developed by Jack Snyder and colleagues. This theory claims that the democratization process can contribute to the outbreak of war, given certain circumstances. The problem, according to the theory, is that a weak institutional framework not only prevents the institutions from functioning properly, but that they also allow for different elites to take advantage of the weak institutions. If elites feel sufficiently threatened by the democratization process, they will be prone to resort to nationalist rhetoric. This can mobilize the population in a violent direction, and a conflict can be the outcome. The analysis is thus focused on three main aspects of the democratization processes in Russia and Chechnya. First; the institutional development, second; the elite competition and third; the nationalist mobilization. This is a case study in which mainly secondary sources are used to trace the impacts of, and relationships between, historical events in the processes leading up to the war. The findings suggest that the democratization process in fact had a significant influence on the decision to go to war on both sides. Weak institutions and elite competition led to a dangerous environment in both Russia and Chechnya, and in both places the use of nationalist rhetoric played a role in the immediate period before the war. A finding, which somehow challenges Snyder's theory, is that the difference to which the national identities were developed in Russia and Chechnya prior to the onset of democratization also mattered for the likelihood of the use of nationalist rhetoric by the elites. Thus, not every assumption made in the theory fits with this case. It is nevertheless necessary to include the democratization process when analyzing what led to the outbreak of the Russo-Chechen war.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Research Question

In December 1994, Russian and Chechen military forces clashed in Grozny, in what was to become a brutal and prolonged war. Peaceful problem solving mechanisms could perhaps have solved the conflict, but these were not used. What made the two sides choose confrontation? Numerous efforts have been made to explain the motives behind the use of violence. Some see the war as a direct consequence of the breakdown of the Soviet Union, and the need for Russia to protect its territorial integrity. Others emphasize the struggle for control over natural resources in the North Caucasus. Still others maintain that the personal traits of the leaders in Russia and Chechnya were decisive. The democratization process has been viewed as a contributing factor to the unstable environment leading to conflict. But whether the democratization process as such was a direct source of war has not yet been extensively studied. This thesis aims to fill this research gap by asking:

Was the democratization process a cause of the Russo-Chechen war?

1.2 Analytical approach

Democracy and regime change have for many years been subject to academic debates. Some theories emphasize the potential democracy has for promoting peace, while others argue that the link between democracy and peace is not that obvious. While democracy may indeed promote peace, the process of moving from an authoritarian to a democratic state may have the opposite effect.

In this analysis I will apply a theory developed by Jack Snyder and colleagues, who hold that democratization, in certain circumstances, can lead to conflict. Snyder argues that the opening of society during a democratization process can lead to harsh

competition for power between desperate elites, and provoke the employment of extreme measures in this struggle. This is because the democratization process allocates more influence to the population as voters, and the elites need support from them in order to gain power. Sudden, unrestricted freedom of speech and rapid institutional changes can trigger the elites to employ extreme measures in a situation where the division of power is not yet set. An important element in the theory is how the elites can use nationalist rhetoric to mobilize the population for support. The institutional development is a crucial factor as well, both because weak institutions are dangerous, and because they determine the environment in which the elite can operate. Elites can take advantage of institutional weaknesses, if they view democratic institutions as limiting their own ability to achieve power. The combination of threatened elites, institutional vacuum and a more open public space might lead to a situation where the outbreak of a violent conflict is imminent. The analysis will thus focus on three factors: the institutional development, elite competition and the nationalist mobilization. These factors work together to produce a violent outcome.

Snyder's theory is relevant for many of the challenges which arose in the democratization process during and after the fall of the Soviet Union. Opportunistic elites and weak institutions were central features in both Russia and Chechnya at this time. The democratization process in the Soviet Union, in which Russia and Chechnya were administrative units, started in the late 1980s. I will examine the period from the introduction of democratization and until the outbreak of war in 1994. The war itself will thus not be examined. Developments in Russia and Chechnya were in some respect similar, especially in the early stages. The developments after the fall of the Soviet Union were quite different, however.

Russia was a union republic (RSFSR), and in practice the administrative and economic center of the Soviet Union. In 1991 Russia became a sovereign state, and as the officially recognized successor state of the Soviet Union it inherited its state

institutions.¹ A majority of the political elite had emerged within the Communist Party, but many changed their ideology in the wake of democratization. The liberal elite, led by Boris Yeltsin, was enormously popular in the early stages, but his government faced problems in the implementation stage of its policies. A test of the strength of Russian democratization came in 1993, when conflicts between different institutions surfaced. The chaotic manner in which the democratization process took place in Russia laid the ground for extreme views to be voiced, and by 1994 Yeltsin had developed his policies in a more patriotic direction.

Chechnya-Ingushetia was an autonomous republic within the RSFSR. None of the entities at this administrative level have, so far, become *de jure* sovereign states. Chechnya and Ingushetia did, however, split in two separate entities after 1991, and Chechen demands for autonomy were made independently of the Ingush. A number of explanations have been suggested to explain Chechnya's strive for independence, such as experiences of suppression by the Russians before and during Soviet times, cultural explanations and the local elite's desire to benefit from oil revenues. However, I am not primarily trying to explain *why* they seek independence, but to explain *how* their struggle led to a violent conflict. Nationalist forces became extremely powerful in the wake of democratization. This was facilitated by the fact that the Soviet system granted territorial autonomy to ethnic groups, which made it possible for a new elite to declare independence. The state building process stagnated quickly however, and internal rivalries dominated the immediate period before the war broke out. When Russia invaded in 1994, the Chechen groups united against their common enemy.

It is a question of definition whether to call the Russo-Chechen war a civil war. Some would say that since Chechnya had declared itself independent, the war was between two sovereign states. Chechnya did, however, lack a number of the formal prerequisites of a state, such as a functioning state apparatus and external recognition.

¹ The Russian Federation (RF) and Russia are both official names for the Russian state, and are used interchangeably in the literature. In this thesis Russia will be used.

Thus it seems reasonable to label the war a civil war. Regardless of this distinction, Snyder's theory can be used on both international and civil wars.

This thesis demonstrates that the democratization process had a similar impact on Chechnya and Russia. The institutions were weak, and were subject to manipulation by power holders. The competition for power became intense, and to some degree anarchic. This increased on both sides the likelihood to take to arms, and both sides needed an enemy to mobilize against. Nationalist rhetoric was used to different degrees in Russia and Chechnya, but nationalism played a role both places. The democratization process thus led both parties to a situation when war became expedient.

1.3 Methodology

This is an intensive, in-depth investigation of the two parties of the Russo-Chechen war. The internal development on each side is essential to understand the concrete impact of the democratization process. As this study addresses the issue of how a certain process affected decision making patterns, the case study approach is useful. Robert Yin (2003: 13) terms a case study as the following:

“An empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident”.

In a case study it is advantageous to operate with a small number of units. This method is useful when asking *how* and *why* questions, which deal with operational links, needing to be traced over time, rather than frequencies or incidences. The case under scrutiny here consists of two main units, the two parties of the Russo-Chechen war, and the investigation focuses on how events relate to one another in the development towards the outbreak of war. In the analysis I argue that there are specific links between a process and a certain outcome. The issue of internal validity, whether inferences made that one event resulted from another event are correct, is

thus important to be aware of (Yin, 2003: 36). By concretely stating the objectives of my inquiry, the type of information I am looking for, and how I seek to analyze it, I have clarified the procedures for making such inferences. The reader will thus be able to link the analysis with the evidence presented. This procedure can also allow for reliability – that a later investigator can follow the same procedures and conduct the same case study, and thereby make the same findings and conclusions. In the procedures used in the analysis, I link events and make assumptions on the causality in work. The complexity of history is important to be aware of. I borrow some tools from historical explanation and process-tracing:

“The process-tracing method attempts to identify the intervening causal process – the causal chain and causal mechanism – between an independent variable (or variables) and the outcome of the dependent variable” (George and Bennett, 2005: 206)

A methodological problem arising is that variables excluded from the analysis might have an impact on the outcome as well. It may be difficult to eliminate all potential rival explanations, especially where human agents are involved (George and Bennett, 2005: 207). Yin (2003) emphasizes that replication of the findings in further case study is necessary in order to generalize to similar cases. The potential for generalization is thus limited when using a case study and in this analysis I will not attempt to make conclusions on the behalf of all similar cases. The results can lead to analytical generalization, and a modification of the theory. The findings can in turn be applied in later investigations of similar cases. The explanatory power of a theory is always limited, and the theory used here also has its weaknesses. Case studies employing process-tracing can play an important role in development of theories (George and Bennett, 2005: 209).

Sources

In this thesis I bring together different empirical accounts of the case, and extract aspects which are relevant for the research question. New data has not been collected. Instead, in an attempt to develop a new understanding of the material, existing

material has been analyzed using an alternative perspective to that used by previous investigators. Various types of sources have been used – academic books and articles, newspapers and internet sources, journalistic accounts and memoirs, most of which are secondary ones. A number of problems can be connected with the use of sources and the collection of evidence. How one chooses to present the empirical evidence is primarily a question of interpretation, as it is impossible to include a complete representation of reality. Nevertheless it is crucial that the evidence presented is correct (Dahl, 1973). When using a source, one must consider its applicability to describe the event in question, which depends on its closeness to the event and its reliability. Some degree of caution must be applied when dealing with the interpretations of the events in the sources. This is for example the case with Valery Tishkov, a well-respected scholar, but also a former member of Yeltsin's government. On the one hand his account can give detailed inside information; on the other hand it is likely to be colored by the opinions of the writer, and the angle from which he witnessed the events. It is important to verify information when using such type of source, by double checking the information given in other sources, and leaving out personal viewpoints made by the author. I have chosen to focus primarily on secondary sources, which give detailed and varied information about the development. This approach is sufficient to give a fruitful analysis of the case. Many books and articles are written on the subject, and I have made a choice of which to include here. Many of the sources used are frequently referred to in scholarly work, which adds to their credibility. My approach would probably not have been radically different if I had included other sources as well.

1.4 Transcription

English sources are not consistent with one another in the way Russian and Chechen names and words are transcribed. For the sake of consistency the spelling in this thesis can differ from the spelling in some of the sources. There is especially a huge variety in the way Chechen names are spelled, probably because in some sources they

are translated through Russian and in others directly from Chechen. Russian names are more consistently translated, but also here the spelling differs from one source to another. I have chosen to translate Russian “е” into “ye”, thus I write Yeltsin, not ‘Eltsin and Dudayev, not Dudaev. The Russian “ий”-ending is translated into “y”, thus I write Zhirinovsky, not Zhirinovskii.

1.5 Structure of the thesis

This thesis has six chapters, including this first introductory chapter. In chapter two, I give a more detailed presentation of the theory applied. First, a conceptual clarification of democratization and some related concepts is presented in 2.1, followed by a brief description of the background of the theory, in 2.2. In 2.3, I present Snyder’s theory and some critiques of it, and assess whether they are relevant here. This presentation is divided into three parts – institutional development in 2.3.1, elite competition in 2.3.2 and nationalist mobilization in 2.3.3. These parts define what I will look for in the subsequent analysis.

In chapter three, the historical background is presented. First, I describe the historical relationship between the two parties of the conflict in 3.1, and then I outline the main reasons for the break up of the Soviet Union in 3.2.

In chapter four and five, the theoretical framework will be used to examine developments on both sides of the conflict. The analysis is thus divided in two chapters, chapter four emphasizes the Russian side, and chapter five emphasizes the Chechen side. Both these chapters have subsections regarding institutional development, elite competition, nationalist mobilization, and finally a discussion of the findings on each side.

Chapter six concludes the thesis. In 6.1, I summarize and discuss the findings from chapter four and five. I compare the two sides and assess the application of Snyder’s theory to this particular case, and point to theoretical weaknesses. In 6.2, I point to some implications this study has for the case, and discuss whether a violent conflict

could have been avoided. Finally, in 6.2, I discuss the implications the results of this study have for future democratization processes.

2. Theory

2.1 Defining democratization

The process of democratization is a central concept in this thesis. Democratization refers to a process of transition from some kind of regime other than democracy towards democracy (Snyder, 2000: 25). A regime can be said to be the informal or formal procedures which determine access to governmental power, and how decisions are made in a state. There are variations between different types of regimes as to which actors are to be involved in these procedures. Some sort of institutionalization must necessarily be present, so that the procedures are known and practiced (O'Donnell and Schmitter, 1986: 73). It is important not to confuse the term democratization with democracy, which refers to an established regime type.

Democracy is a contested concept, measured in different ways by different scholars. A seminal contribution to democracy theory is given by Robert Dahl (1971). He emphasizes the continuing responsiveness of the government to the preferences of its citizens, considered as political equals. His basic criteria are “political participation” and “contestation”, defined by a number of liberties. In Dahl’s model, both criteria fall along a continuum. In his view, democracy is an ideal type against which all political systems can be measured. At the other end of the scale we find dictatorships.²

² How to measure the level of democracy is a subject of discussion. While some, like Dahl and the often used Freedom House index (<http://www.freedomhouse.org/>) apply a gradual measure of democracy, others prefer a dichotomous measure. A gradual measure can reflect the development a regime goes through over time, but the proponents of a dichotomous measure argue that a regime cannot be “half-democratic”. According to the dichotomous measure, a regime is either democratic or not, and it is not possible to grade types of democracy. Sartori, for example, sees systems as bounded wholes characterized by constitutive mechanisms and principles that are either present or absent. First a regime must be classified democracy or non-democracy. Then as a second step, a further set of criteria can be applied to those regimes deemed democratic by the initial dichotomy (Adcock and Collier, 1999: 541-545)

In his model Dahl shows that the political regime is not a constant feature, but has potential to change in various directions. By using Dahl's definition of democracy, we can label a state democratizing if it has adopted one or more democratic characteristics.³ Jack Snyder gives a similar, but more detailed definition of democracy, which fits with Dahl's gradual measure of democracy. He labels states democratizing if they have recently adopted one or more of these democratic characteristics, even if they retain important non-democratic features:

“In mature democracies, government policy, including foreign and military policy, is made by officials chosen through free, fair and periodic elections in which a substantial proportion of the adult population can vote; the actions of officials are constrained by constitutional provisions and commitments to civil liberties; and government candidates sometimes lose elections and leave office when they do. Freedom of speech, freedom to organize groups to contest elections, and reasonably equitable representation of varied viewpoints in the media are presumed to be preconditions for a free and fair election” (Snyder, 2000: 26).

Democratization thus refers to a number of processes which are supposed to stimulate change in a democratic direction, by introducing institutions and practices which can make both the regime and the society as a whole reflect democratic values.

O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986: 8) define democratization as “The processes whereby the rules and procedures of citizenship are either applied to political institutions previously governed by other principles, or expanded to include persons not previously enjoying such rights and obligations, or extended to cover issues and institutions not previously subject to citizen participation.” During the transition rules are in constant flux, and usually contested by different actors seeking to defend both their immediate interests, and their ability to define the rules for future political competition. The changes during a democratization process can roughly be divided in

³ Rule of law is usually another trait usually emphasized in a definition of democracy. Richard Rose and Neil Munro (2002: 42) argue that “A completely democratic state must meet two conditions: it must be a modern, rule-of-law state and the government must be chosen by free elections”.

two main features – one being that new political institutions are put in place, and the other being that society opens up. Combined, these changes give each individual an increased opportunity to have a say in political decision-making.

The term autocracy or dictatorship is often used as a residual category. A regime where only a marginal part of the population is involved in the political game, and the majority must accept the decisions made by the political elite, can be labeled autocratic. The population is often prevented, by law or other measures, from engaging in activities challenging the power holders. This is consistent with the definition used by Snyder and Mansfield:

“In an autocracy, state authorities are accountable only to themselves, or at most a group of elites that maintain unity when dealing with outsiders. No significant political activity – in particular, no contestation for power – is allowed outside the ruling group”(Snyder and Mansfield, 2005: 40).

The diffuse space between a full democracy and a full dictatorship is in scholarly work often occupied by a “mixed regime”, an “anocracy” or a “semi-democracy”. These are regimes that are in the midst of a democratization or autocratization process and have stagnated on the way, or who fail to fulfill the basic criteria of a democracy. Political competition falls short of full democracy, because of restrictions on who can participate, how they can participate, or what issues they can raise. The vast majority of mixed regimes hold elections of some kind, although they fall short of the fully democratic standard of competitive and fair elections (Snyder and Mansfield, 2005: 41).

Richard Sakwa (1993: 25) discusses whether the term “democratization” is appropriate to use on the Russian case, and argues that the “whole notion of ‘transition’ has a somewhat deterministic air, suggesting that the destination is known and that the transition from communism to democracy is inevitable. Just because the actors themselves insist that the goal is democracy is no reason why we should accept that at face value, though it might be part of the truth”. He suggests the term

“modernization” or “creating a new political order” to be more appropriate. To some extent, Sakwa has a point in saying that the term might be misinterpreted by some as a process that *must* lead to democracy. For analytical purposes, however, the term covers the institutional and political changes in Russia in a suitable way, without claiming that these processes automatically lead to a democracy. Democratization is not understood here, or in most other scholarly work, as an irreversible process. It does not necessarily lead to a consolidated democracy. A democratizing state can fall back into autocracy, or stay a semi-democracy for a long period of time. The analysis later in this thesis will demonstrate why it must be legitimate to claim that Russia, in the period under discussion, was democratizing according to the above-mentioned definition.

2.2 Democratic peace theory

Jack Snyder developed his theory as a response to a growing body of literature known as the democratic peace theory.⁴ This theory proposes that democracies are less likely to fight wars than other types of regimes, and that they rarely, if ever, go to war with each other. The theory draws heavily on Immanuel Kant’s influential work “Perpetual Peace” from 1795, where he introduced the idea that democracies have a more peaceful conduct, both internally and externally, than autocracies (Doyle, 1997: 251). A basic prerequisite for world peace is thus, in Kant’s theory, that more countries adopt democratic forms of governance. Two main explanations are given for why consolidated democracies have a more peaceful conduct. One is a structural explanation, which emphasizes how leaders are constrained by the population in their decision making. Citizens have institutional means to constrain political leaders through the ballot box, and political leaders can be removed from office. This adds costs to a decision to wage a war, and makes democracies supposedly more reluctant to start wars. The other is a normative explanation, with emphasis on cultural aspects

⁴ The democratic peace theory is also referred to as the liberal peace thesis in the literature.

and the link to liberalism. Democracies simply do not *want* to go to war (Ray, 1995: 91).

In recent years, scholars have produced a number of arguments and empirical evidence for the connection between regime type and the likelihood of war, and research have been conducted at different levels.⁵ Michael Doyle (1997) supports the idea put forward by Kant, and argues that democratic states have created a “separate peace” – they do not fight wars against other democracies. Yet, he argues, they are not less prone to fight wars against autocracies. Zeev Maoz and Bruce Russett (1993) also find, in exploring the dyadic level, that “democracy, in and of itself has a consistent and robust negative effect on the likelihood of conflict”.

The body of research on this theory has created a degree of consensus, at least within academic circles, about the potential democracy has to stabilize peace when democracies are dealing with one another. It is more difficult to say what kind of effect the initial stages of democratization can have on the likelihood of war in a country. If it is the case, as Jack Snyder proposes, that the democratization process in fact increases the risk of war, the consequence of multiple transitions could be fatal. It is necessary to investigate which dangers democratization processes can involve, and how they can be better managed. Otherwise we might risk jeopardizing international security.

2.3 Democratization and war

Jack Snyder developed his theory as a response to the growing belief in democracy, and by extension also democratization, as a remedy against warfare.⁶ Instead, he

⁵ The different levels are the dyadic, which is between pairs of states; systemic, which is within a network of states; and internal, which is within one state. The focus has been on the systemic and dyadic levels, not so much on the internal level. This is probably because the theory has been used mainly in studies of international relations.

⁶ Jack Snyder has cooperated with other theorists on developing the theory, such as Karen Ballentine (See Snyder and Ballentine, 1996) and Edward Mansfield (See Snyder and Mansfield, 1995; Snyder and Mansfield, 2002; Snyder and Mansfield, 2005). These should also be credited for their contributions. For the sake of simplicity, however, the theory will

claimed that democratization, if it is carried out in a poor manner, can have the opposite effect on the likelihood of war. His theory was initially developed to show that democratizing states are prone to take part in international wars, but the theory went on to include civil wars as well. He argues that democratizing states are more likely to experience civil wars than are both democracies and autocracies. Snyder is not the only one who has put forward such a claim.

Gleditsch and Hegre (1997) argue that democratization initially leads to an increasing conflict level, and only leads to peace in the long run. Harshly authoritarian states and institutionally consistent democracies experience fewer civil wars than intermediate regimes, which possess inherent contradictions as a result of being neither democratic nor autocratic. This is also shown in research by for example de Nardo (1985), Francisco (1995) and Mueller and Weede (1990). Hegre, Ellingsen, Gates and Gleditsch (2001) argue that regimes in change are more prone to violence than both stable democracies and stable autocracies. Political change deconsolidates political institutions and heightens the risk of civil war, as discussed for example by Sahin and Linz (1995) and Tarrow (1994). The conflict-preventing effect of democratic institutions is often explained by trust in the system. One problem is that a stable democracy also requires a certain level of support for political and societal institutions and their leaders (Steen, 2003: 25). When the institutions are weakly developed, such a support is difficult to find, and the conflict-preventing effect disappears. Samuel Huntington (1991) finds that political violence often occurs during democratization processes. While some of these theories point to the danger of societal unrest and violence in general, Jack Snyder explores one particular ideology which might be sparked by the democratization process, namely nationalism.

Snyder argues that when the regime goes through fundamental changes, it is more vulnerable to pressure from certain groups in society, and lacks institutions to deal with a number of crises that might arise. One potential consequence of the

be referred to as Snyder's theory in the following. This is also because Snyder has had a leading position in the development of the theory.

democratization process is that it leaves room for the political elite to take advantage of nationalist sentiments in the population in order to gain support and secure their own powerbase. Snyder's theory can help us to understand how war can erupt in a democratizing state, by showing how interests are more likely to confront in a violent way. The theory does not, however, attempt to explain the underlying reasons behind those interests. Instead it claims that institutional prerequisites for conflict are more important than explanations such as historical grievances or cultural traits. Later we will see how Snyder's theory in this regard contradicts some common assumptions about the Russo-Chechen conflict.

Some criticism has been raised towards Snyder's theory, especially its early versions (See Snyder and Mansfield, 1995). The main body of criticism is, however, directed against the statistics used in developing and testing the theory, and not necessarily against the theory as such (See for example Braumoeller, 1997; Thompson and Tucker, 1997; Wolf, et al., 1996). These will thus not be addressed in this thesis.

Snyder's theory presents a model where several factors work together to increase the risk of conflict. I have chosen to present the theory on the basis of what I see as the three main factors contained in the model – the institutional development, elite competition, and nationalist mobilization. These three aspects are not independent of each other. It is necessary to see them as parts of a dynamic model, they are mechanisms working together to form the circumstances described in Snyder's theory. Combined, they can serve to increase the conflict potential of a democratization process, if taken negatively advantage of by different actors in the process. While another student of Snyder's theory might choose to describe the theory in another manner, and emphasize other aspects than what is done here, this does not mean that any of our interpretations of the theory lack consistence with the theory itself. It would simply demonstrate that there are numerous ways of applying one single theory.

Below the theoretical assumptions are presented. First the institutional development, second elite competition and third the nationalist mobilization. In the next two

chapters the theory is applied to the Russian side and the Chechen side in order to analyze how the two parties were influenced by these three aspects of the democratization process when they made the decision to go to war. This can help evaluate whether the theory gives a fruitful explanation of the outbreak of this particular war.

2.3.1 Institutional development

A democratization process entails the introduction of new institutions such as elections and political parties, and major changes in existing ones such as the power of the military and the judiciary. Institutions are patterns of repeated, conventional behavior around which expectations converge (Snyder, 2000: 48).

“Strong institutions shape expectations and behavior with a high degree of predictability: people know that almost everyone else will conform to the expected pattern and consequently that failure to conform will make it harder to accomplish tasks that require coordination with others. Weak institutions, in contrast, have not become ingrained habits: people know that others may not conform. This does little to shape expectations and regulate behavior” (Snyder and Mansfield, 2005: 44).

The problem with weak institutions is, on the one hand, that they take time to establish, but more dangerously that they allow for exploitation. The functioning of institutions is also a collective action problem, because institutions lose their meaning if they are not being utilized the way they are supposed to. New democratic institutions are in the beginning probably not powerful enough to replace centralized coercive institutions of the previous regime, each group is primarily concerned with making sure that its own interests are served. This way, no one has sufficient power or motive to look out for the coherence of the overall policy outcome. An incomplete democratization process in a context of weak institutions gives the elite an incentive to use the situation for personal achievements (Snyder and Mansfield, 2005: 55-57).

It necessarily takes time for institutions to establish themselves and become a permanent feature of the system, but in transitional states the public often anticipates the results of the democratization process with anxiety. Demands for fast changes are made which might be impossible to fulfill, instead causing the authorities to make hasty decisions to satisfy the population. The development of media and a competitive environment of mass communication can also create opportunities for successful nationalist persuasion in democratizing states (Snyder, 2000: 55). The gap between rising demands for mass participation and the declining ability of political institutions to settle the conflicts of interest that this entails is a fundamental problem of societies undergoing incomplete democratization in a context of weak governmental institutions (Snyder and Mansfield, 2005: 59). This leads to an institutional gap. The impatience to see change can not be met by decisive action if institutions are not present to absorb the demands of the population.

The order in which the institutions are introduced is also critical. The ideal path of development is one where the government is institutionalized, with clear divisions of power between different branches, before elections are held. If mass suffrage elections are held too early, before proper and stable political parties are made, and before checks on the freedom of speech are developed, the result can be fatal. Both Robert Dahl and Samuel Huntington pointed out that democratic transitions are most successful when strong political institutions are developed before popular participation increases. In general, the idea of sequences has been rather marginal in democratization theory, but Snyder argues that sequence is important (Snyder and Mansfield, 2005: 3-4). Dankwart Rustow (1970) was the first to emphasize this. He criticized the approaches to democratization in the 1970s, which focused mainly on the prerequisites of democracy – such as wealth, literacy and a large middle class. In contrast, Rustow argued that the stability of democratic consolidation depends on the sequence in which the requisites appear.

Erik Nordlinger (1968) follows the same line of argumentation. He proposes a four-stage process where a national identity ideally should come before a central government is institutionalized, parties are introduced and elections are held. If an

attempt is made to accomplish this in a rapid fashion, the outcome is likely to be widespread violence and repressive rule, making it difficult to establish a stable democratic system. Early introduction of mass suffrage has usually resulted from populist rhetoric, stimulating high expectations for popular influence upon governmental decisions (Nordlinger, 1968: 498-518). Stabilizing governmental structures before party competition and mass suffrage are introduced can on the other hand dampen the intensity of partisan conflicts, because they are then channeled through and processed by the mediating governmental institutions.

An ideal democratization process begins, according to Snyder, with the state's construction of an orderly administrative powerbase, followed by development of the rule of law and institutions of public debate. The first two steps should be completed before the state can incorporate conflicting demands by the public in an effective manner (Snyder and Mansfield, 2005: 59). Because such a process develops at different levels and cannot be planned in detail, it is of limited use to speak of an "ideal", but it can help reveal how different aspects of the process actually depend on one another. Democratic elections are supposed to reduce the conflict level in society by allowing all voices to have a say in the political process, but when important prerequisites for democracy are missing, the election can instead become an arena for mobilization of hate. Snyder argues that elections should not be introduced too early in a transitional process. This is contrary to a somewhat established popular conviction that a country can move from autocracy to democracy in a short period of time, if only it manages to hold "free and fair" elections. It is doubtful whether one election can achieve a complete system change, especially if other democratic institutions are missing. The context in which elections are held is therefore central when assessing whether or not the first elections are premature.

Another aspect related to the institutionalization of a new regime, is the development of a more open media environment and a growth in channels through which the freedom of speech can be exercised, both by politicians and the population. The success or failure of the elite's attempts at persuasion is strongly influenced by the structure of *the marketplace of ideas*. This is defined by Snyder and Ballentine (1996)

in terms of partial monopolies of supply of political information, the segmentation of demand, and the strength of institutions that scrutinize and integrate public debate. They warn against giving full press freedom in initial phases of democratization, arguing that promoting unconditional freedom of public debate in newly democratizing societies is likely to make the problem of nationalist conflict worse. It can allow populist mythmakers to take control of the public discourse, which can serve to strengthen nationalist attitudes in the population. When there are no control mechanisms on the media, nationalist myths are more likely to be fuelled than refuted, which can contribute to environment of escalating mythmaking (Snyder and Ballentine, 1996: 54-57).

Snyder and Ballentine also claim that a “partial monopoly” of the marketplace of ideas, which often occurs during the earliest stages of democratization, may be as bad as a perfect monopoly, if not worse (Snyder and Ballentine, 1996: 14-15). When there is a lack of institutions to control hate speech and false accusations in media, it can lead to dangerous confrontations. In autocratic regimes, where the leaders have full control over media, the public tends to be skeptical about the ideas that are presented in the press, but when the marketplace of ideas is released, it is more difficult to know which sources to trust. That way the newly freed press can become a vehicle for nationalist appeals. Both the old and new elites are typically reluctant to allow full democratization, since this might pose a threat to their access to power.

The success of the democratization process can be judged by how smooth institutional changes are made, and what role the institutions come to play in the everyday functioning of the state. There are, however, problems attached to the building of a new institutional environment, the challenge often being that the institutions are weak, and consequently develop in a less fruitful, and perhaps even destructive, direction. This is particularly the case in states where state institutions were weak to begin with, and where they are open to manipulation by power holders. Another problem, according to Snyder, is that elites in transitional societies usually see the weakness of democratic institutions more as an opportunity than as a danger. If they can get a message through to the public that democratic institutions are

unpredictable and unreliable, they will do so because it can secure their own powerbase (Snyder, 2000: 55). When powerful groups feel threatened by democracy, they seek to keep their states' institutions weak and vulnerable to manipulation. The problem of institutional weakness can thus be strongly related to the issue of opportunistic elites (Snyder and Mansfield, 2005: 59). Elites in opposition can also exploit the weakness of the institutions, and thereby intensify and possibly make the competition with the established elite more violent.

In sum, Snyder claims that weak institutions are dangerous because they limit the ability of society to resolve conflicts that arise. Lack of institutional constraints on the power holders can cause problems if the institutions are weak. The institutions are left open for manipulation for political gains, and remain weak if elites prevent them from becoming permanent features of the regime. If democratic institutions are introduced in the wrong order, this can lead to a destabilized political environment. Mass suffrage and elections should not come before the central government is established. If the marketplace of ideas is opened too early, it can serve as a vehicle for mobilization of hate due to the lack of control mechanisms.

In the analysis I will thus trace how and when democratic institutions were introduced, and evaluate to what extent these institutions were strong or weak. I will discuss whether the order of institutionalization influenced their strength, and how different elites took advantage of institutional weaknesses. I will also look at how the marketplace of ideas developed, and whether it was taken advantage of for political purposes.

2.3.2 Elite competition

When the regime in a country undergoes changes in a more democratic direction, its leadership and powerful position holders or people with access to these positions must adjust to new ways of acquiring influence. The power holders face a situation where they lose influence and power, while new opportunities arise for alternative elites to gain power. The population can exercise more influence on political

processes though voting, while the burden of giving up or sharing power is usually placed on the elite. In Snyder's theory the diminishing influence of the elite is a central factor which might lead to instability. The old elite tries to hold on to power, and new elites are given an opportunity to fight for influence, while the rules of the game are not yet defined. A chaotic situation can emerge, where different elites compete desperately to win the hearts and minds of the voters in order to secure powerful positions.

Elites influence political decision-making processes in some way, either directly or indirectly. They differ from the population as a whole by being able to define premises and make decisions, and by potentially influencing political outcomes (Steen, 2003: 17). The concept of elite can take on a number of different meanings, depending on the context. This thesis is concerned with the political elite, and more specifically the ruling group in a society, consisting of the people who take decisions of countrywide significance (Kryshtanovskaya and White, 1996: 712). According to Snyder, elites do, to different extents, feel threatened by the introduction of democratic institutions. This is because it challenges their traditional hold on power, and for this power to remain through the first turbulent stage of voter mobilization, the elites need to play their cards right. When the rules of the game change, they need to adapt in order to avoid giving away power to those who play the game better than themselves.

Elites have several ideological options for making their appeals to a newly awakened mass public. One is liberalism, but according to Snyder few elites in newly democratizing, poorly institutionalized states are likely to find this option attractive, because it is based on true accountability to the average voter. This means that they risk losing power if it turns out the public do not want them in that position. Another option is to appeal to the class interests of the voters, or even more useful; to cross-class values or interests such as religion or nationalism (Snyder and Mansfield, 2005: 61). To the extent that the elite actually manages to benefit from nationalism, it often keeps a partial control over powerful governmental, economic, and media resources, despite the rise in mass politics. This is also due to the weak institutional framework.

Institutions governing public debate are often too weak to check the influence of nationalist mythmakers, and the elites can take advantage of this (Snyder, 2000: 54).

When elites feel threatened, they become desperate to gather support, and try to convince the population to follow their political direction. This is because elites in a democratization process have a much narrower room for maneuver when it comes to using different kinds of power than in an autocratic regime. They can, however, take advantage of weak institutions to exercise the distinct type of power that they want. Old means of legitimating elite rule are no longer valid, and instruments of repression and patronage become harder to exercise effectively. Infrastructural power, especially the power of liberal democratic institutions, is likely to be limited: efficiency and fairness in public administration, professional journalism, and political parties, as well as the rule of law, are likely to be in short supply (Snyder and Mansfield, 2005: 54). The lack of functioning institutions can thus be of some assistance to the elites in their attempts to mobilize support.

Snyder claims that the path of the transition is influenced by the degree of threat to elite interests and the strength of political institutions in the beginning of that process. The subsequent trajectory is further shaped by the strategies that political actors adopt in the course of the transition, including the coalitions they form, the rules they institutionalize, and the ideologies they promote (Snyder and Mansfield, 2005: 45). The first problem nationalist elites face is to create the possibility of effective collective action on a national scale (Snyder, 2000: 51). A democratization process takes place at different levels simultaneously, and is impossible to control. Promoting a common identity can help the elite in overcoming collective action-problems, which are common in democratization processes. In the next part we will see how, and under which circumstances, nationalism can be used in this process.

In sum, Snyder argues that in a democratization process the elite in power needs to attract support because it feels threatened. Simultaneously alternative elites gain new opportunities to take power. Both old and new elites will attempt to find an ideology which can be used effectively for mobilization of support, and nationalism can prove

useful for this purpose. Elites can also take advantage of weak institutions to gain access to powerful positions. Harsh competition between elites, in an environment where the rules of the game are unclear, can lead to conflict.

In the analysis I will thus investigate how the democratization process influenced the manner in which elites behaved, and how divisions between different elites materialized. I will examine to what extent members of the old elite were threatened by the democratization process, how they expressed fear of losing power, and what measures they employed to hold on to power. I will also look at how new elites maneuvered to access power, and to what extent different elites resorted to nationalist rhetoric.

2.3.3 Nationalist mobilization

According to Snyder nationalism is an ideology with great appeal for elites in democratizing states. This is because they can mobilize mass support through the language of popular sovereignty – rule in the name of the people, without needing the accountability that would be provided by free and fair elections and the rule of law (Snyder and Mansfield, 2005: 39). It also offers a built-in justification for restricting the rights of potential opponents.

Nationalism can be adapted to justify the political exclusion of almost any type of group, since it can present almost any contender as a threat against national unity, which is a powerful claim (Snyder, 2000: 52). Both rising new elites and falling old elites have the motive and the opportunity to resort to the rhetoric of nationalism. This can create a spiral of competition, where the winner is the one using the most convincing nationalistic rhetoric. The strength of the national identity also determines how actively the elite can use this ideology, but according to Snyder the democratization process in itself can also shape the content of the national identity.

Before proceeding, I will define more specifically the concepts *nation* and *nationalism*. Through history, the concept of nation has been attributed various

meanings, for example the population of a state or a group of people with common cultural traits (Østerud, 1994: 15-22). Anthony Smith (2001: 13) defines the nation as "A named human community occupying a homeland, and having common myths and a shared history, a common public culture, a single economy and common rights and duties for all members". As pointed out by Benedict Anderson (2006), nations are in a sense imagined communities, as it is impossible for all members to have contact with each other. Nations have a subjective and an objective identity – meaning that the members must identify themselves within the nation, and that there are some objective criteria, such as language, religion and history, to use for identification. Smith (2001: 9) writes that nationalism is an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity and identity for a population which some of its members deem to constitute an actual or potential "nation". Nationalism takes the existence of the nation for granted, and presupposes that the world is divided into nations, that the nation is the sole source for political power and that loyalty to the nation overrides all other loyalties (Smith, 2001: 22). This ideology developed in Europe in the eighteenth century. According to Ernest Gellner (1998), the idea of the nation developed out of necessity when the industrial revolution changed the relationship between individuals and the state from a passive one to a more active one. While Gellner claims that nations were "built" around existing administrative structures, Smith sees a link between the development of nations and pre-modern ethnic identities.

Snyder's point of view is that the type of nationalism that causes conflict is not only divisive; it is shaped to a large extent by the democratization process through what he calls "elite persuasion". Yet, elites cannot simply generate nationalist sentiments without some kind of national identity already present.

"Democratization produces nationalism when powerful groups within the nation not only need to harness popular energies to the tasks of war and economic development, but they also want to avoid surrendering real political authority to the average citizen. Nationalist conflict arise as a by-product of elites efforts to persuade the people to accept divisive nationalist ideas" (Snyder, 2000: 32)

Snyder contrasts his “elite persuasion” perspective on national mobilization with what he calls the “popular rivalries” view. In this view, popular nationalist rivalries precede democratization, which in due course gives expression to long-held, popular aspirations of an already-formed nation. The popular-rivalries theory holds that the best predictors of the intensity of nationalist conflict during democratization are a history of violence between the national groups and an ethnically intermingled demographic pattern (Snyder, 2000: 85). Snyder argues that this view is not valid, by saying that “nations are not simply freed or awakened by democratization; they are formed by the experiences they undergo during that process” (Snyder, 2000: 31-36). He claims that most of the contemporary conflicts in the world are not due to ancient cultural hatreds. In some cases, the warring groups had experienced no armed conflict until relatively recently (Snyder, 2000: 18). He also emphasizes that mass nationalism seldom is well developed before democratization. More commonly, it rises during the earliest phase of democratic change. “In the era before the majority of the population takes an active part in political life, their sense of belonging to a nation is usually weak” (Snyder, 2000: 35).

David Byman and Stephen Van Evera (1998; 1994) offer an alternative to Snyder’s position. According to them, nations that perceive their existence to be threatened can choose to go to war regardless of regime, but a regime change can trigger the mechanisms that lead nationalism to become malignant – and duly violent. The risk posed by nationalism depends on whether it is benign and peaceful, or malign and violent, and whether the demands of the group are satisfied or not (Van Evera, 1994: 7-9). They thus see the effect of nationalism as independent of the effect of democratization. The democratization process as such does not generate nationalist sentiments, but can contribute to their entrance into the public debate. They emphasize an essentialist view on nationality, which is more similar to Smith’s understanding of the nation, and in line with what Snyder labels the “popular rivalries”-explanation. It presupposes set identities that are clashing against one another in the wake of political freedoms. Democratization is particularly problematic in societies where many ethnicities compete for power, and a solution can be to give

minorities assurances to avoid an internal security dilemma. This is directly opposite to the solution proposed by Snyder:

“The popular-rivalries theory prescribes power sharing schemes or ethnic partitions as means of disentangling rival ethnic groups, whereas my theory warns that such putative remedies might needlessly lock in inimical ethnic identities. However, these two approaches do agree on one prescription: it is dangerous to unleash democratization before effective antidotes to nationalist conflict are in place” (Snyder 2000: 85).

The type of nationalism that emerges during democratization depends, according to Snyder, primarily on the level and timing of economic development, the adaptability of elite interests, and the strength of the country’s political and administrative institutions. His claim is that these correlations are not simply side effects of economic or strategic factors. These outcomes depend on both the motivation and the opportunity of elites to promote nationalist doctrines (Snyder, 2000: 37). The elite can appeal to different types of nationalism; some are more divisive than others. A civic form of nationalism is a less divisive type, but also more difficult to mobilize voters around. The most extreme type is ethnic nationalism, and elites use this when they feel particularly vulnerable (Snyder, 2000: 71). The appeals are often based on untruths or exaggerations, propounded by self-interested groups that aim to derive private benefits from the fruits of public cooperation (Snyder, 2000: 53). This can lead to violent clashes.

“To mobilize support, nationalists often portray other nations as more threatening, more implacable, more culpable for historic wrongs, yet also more easily countered by resolute opposition than they really are” (Snyder, 2000: 67).

In sum, Snyder argues that elites often resort to nationalist rhetoric in a democratization process - especially when they feel threatened. Both old and new elites have an incentive to use nationalism when mobilizing for support. This type of rhetoric can be very effective and thus help them to gain access to powerful positions

in competition with other elites. This can lead to conflict. However, nationalism is by itself not a sufficient explanation of the outbreak of war. The type of nationalism is shaped to a large extent by the democratization process, although a degree of national identity must somehow be present in the population beforehand.

In the analysis I will thus investigate how nationalist rhetoric was used in the mobilization of voters, and which elites appealed to national identity in their mobilizing efforts. Drawing on the theoretical debate regarding the origins of nationalism, I will also investigate to what extent nationalist rhetoric was built around an already existing identity, or one mainly constructed in the wake of democratization. I will analyze whether a national identity was sufficiently in place, and how the existence or lack of a national identity impacted on the use of national rhetoric and the likelihood of its success. If the analysis shows that the presence or absence of a national identity in fact plays a role, this might justify a revision of the theory.

3. Historical Background

In this chapter the context of the Russo-Chechen conflict will be presented. The format of this thesis does not permit deep digging into the historical causes of the conflict, nor is the historical background emphasized heavily in Snyder's approach. The historical relationship between Russia and Chechnya will, however, not be dismissed as unimportant.

3.1 The historical relationship between Russia and Chechnya

The relationship between Russian and Chechnya dates back to the 18th century, when the Russian Empire sought to conquer the Caucasus and advance its territory towards the Black Sea. Chechnya was finally incorporated into the Russian Empire in 1858, after resistance of the local population. On the Chechen side, Imam Shamil was a heroic figure. His guerilla methods became the ideal of later resistance (Radnitz, 2006: 245). The Russian General Alexei Yermolov, famous for his brutal warfare, was the one who finally made Shamil and his men surrender (Gall and De Waal, 1997: 40). From then on Chechnya was put under Russian administration. Some degree of autonomy came after the revolution in 1917. The Chechens and the Dagestanis got temporarily independence in 1918, when they set up a North Caucasus Republic, but by 1921 the republic had been incorporated into the Soviet Union (Lieven, 1998: 318).

Stalin cracked heavily down on rebellion in Chechnya in 1929, and in 1936 it was merged with Ingushetia and given the status of an autonomous republic (Gall and De Waal, 1997: 55). The republic was dissolved in 1944, and most inhabitants were deported to Kazakhstan after alleged cooperation with the Germans during the Second World War. The deportation was not only based on groundless accusations by an increasingly paranoid Stalin, but also carried out in the most brutal way. Half a

million people were forced on board trains and transported to the steppe of Kazakhstan, many did not even survive the three week long journey. Others died of hunger due to poor living conditions in Kazakhstan (Gall and De Waal, 1997: 61). The deportees were allowed to return only in 1957, when Chechnya-Ingushetia was reinstated (Gall and De Waal, 1997: 72).

Russia had always been the cultural and political center of an empire, both before and during the Soviet Union, while Chechnya was in the distant periphery, and had few cultural traits in common with Russia. The relationship between Chechnya and Russia has been cold, but assertions about the constant resistance of the Chechens are often overrated. During Soviet times calls for independence were not voiced, although negative sentiments against the Russians were widespread. Chechnya was among the poorest regions of Russia, with a low degree of literacy and industrial development, and thus highly dependant on economic transactions from the centre. Russians, on the other hand, were not particularly fond of the peoples of the Caucasus, who were often perceived to be wild and uncivilized. Some accounts of the war, especially made by Chechens, recon that the war was unavoidable, because of the history of violence between Russians and Chechens. Leaders of the Chechen independence forces have repeatedly stressed that the Chechens never formally submitted to Russia, never signed any document of surrender or accession, and therefore have full legal and moral rights to independence (Lieven, 1998: 304).

One might allege that it was not a coincidence that the most radical attempts at sovereignty after the fall of the Soviet Union happened in Chechnya. The memory of deportation and how this injured the collective dignity is sometimes given as the chief reason for why the Chechens wanted to break out and form a sovereign state, in addition to the large size of the Chechen population relative to other ethnicities within Russia. This thesis argues, on the other hand, that a history of violent confrontations and hate is not sufficient to explain the outbreak of the war at a later stage in history. The manner in which Russia first conquered Chechnya, and its inhabitant's treatment and resistance during Stalin's regime, are among the issues to keep in mind when attempting to understand the relationship between the Chechens and Russians in a

wider context. The Chechens' motivation in resisting Russian rule following the fall of the Soviet Union might be based on historical enmity, but it is likely that the way the elite portrayed the historical roles of Chechnya and Russia is just as important as the history by itself. I agree here with Evangelista (2002: 12) who says that "shared history did not predetermine the outbreak of war in 1994, but it does go some way toward explaining the Chechens' desire for greater autonomy as the Soviet Union disintegrated."

Considering that ethnicity served as a basis for administrative division in the Soviet Union, it is somehow surprising that violent conflict has not broken out more frequently in Russia. Several other regions challenged the authority of the center, and some achieved a significant degree of sovereignty through special agreements. In other regions of Russia, including autonomous republics such as Tatarstan, former communist leaders managed to reinvent themselves in the face of nationalist pressures and remain in control (Evangelista, 2002: 16). Violent conflict could perhaps have erupted in other parts of Russia as well, but were avoided by using conflict solving mechanisms. Thus, the potential for local solutions to demands of sovereignty was significant, and it seems even more surprising that other attempts at solving disagreements between the Chechen and the Russian governments were not exhausted, or even attempted, before the decision to go to war was made.

3.2 The fall of the Soviet Union

Both the construction and the disintegration of the Soviet Union (USSR) were initiated largely from Russia. The Bolsheviks, led by Lenin, took over power in Russia in 1917, and spent the years until 1922 building up a Union of 15 republics, where both the politics and the economy would be governed by the Communist Party (Sakwa, 2002: 5). By 1987, the foundation of the Union was shaking, due to international pressure, economic stagnation and serious failures of governance. Reforms intended to modernize and thereby secure the survival of the Soviet system were initiated. Instead the state fell apart.

Mikhail Gorbachev, the General Secretary of the Communist Party, was the initiator of the political reforms starting in the late 1980s. *Perestroika* (reorganization) and *Glasnost* (opening) were basically aimed at democratizing the political system. The one-party state was supposed to remain, but power was to be moved from central party organs to the local level, and more autonomy given to local party branches (Sakwa, 2002: 10). In 1989 the first contested elections in the Soviet Union were held, the elections of representatives to the Congress of Deputies. The Communist party was still the only legitimate party (White, et al., 1997: 23). For the first time, though, alternative organizations outside the party were established. In Russia, a mix of civil society organizations and political lobby groups emerged. The new organizations mainly articulated demands for changes in the political and economic system at different levels, and Democratic Russia became a vehicle for the liberal Russian opposition. Nationalist groups such as *Pamyat* (Memory) and *Otechestvo* (Fatherland) were advocating a national revival in Russia, but were more marginal (McFaul, 1997: 23). In some other parts of the Union, the organizations focused more heavily on the national revival of the titular nation. This was also the case in Chechnya. Here a number of organizations emerged, focusing on the history and culture of the Chechen people. The Popular Front was established in 1988, and the core issues on the agenda were the deportation in 1944, and the Chechen struggle against incorporation into the Russian Empire.

The opening of the political space also meant more freedom for the media and the introduction of new views and debates in the public discourse. New publications appeared at a rapid pace, and it became legitimate to question the foundation on which the Soviet Union was built, and to challenge it with alternative ideologies. By creating new arenas for participation and freedom of speech, Gorbachev thus made it possible for a wide variety of political actors, such as radical democrats, hard-line communist conservatives, and nationalists to seize the initiative (Remington, 2004: 46). Once the strict control of the Communist Party had been loosened, the unity among the republics proved to be much weaker than he had anticipated. In the Baltic republics and Georgia, for example, noisy demands for national independence came

as a result of the new, open atmosphere. Eventually, this opening of the political space, in combination with other factors, led to the breakdown of the Soviet system.

In August 1991 the Soviet Union made its final exhale. A failed coup attempt was led by prominent members of the government, the so-called ‘gang of eight’ (Sakwa, 2002: 29).⁷ The failure of the coup makers to regain power undermined not only the conservatives within the communist party, but also the within-system reformers, led by Gorbachev himself (Sakwa, 2002: 437). The winners of the coup were the Russian reformists, led by Boris Yeltsin. Gorbachev resigned, and the Soviet Union disintegrated rapidly after this.

Emerging political elites in Russia and Chechnya seized the new opportunities which came with the opening of the system. These new elites managed to undermine the Soviet institutions, mobilize the population for support, and gain power. In the period after this sudden take-over, problems arose both places due to insufficient institutionalization of the new regime. In the following two chapters I analyze developments in Chechnya and Russia in this period and show how the democratization process contributed to the outbreak of war.

⁷ Some of the members of this group were Vice President Gennady Yanayev, KGB head Vladimir Kryuchkov, Soviet Prime Minister Valentin Pavlov, and Defense Minister Dmitry Yazov (Bransten, 2001)

4. The Russian side

“The Russian state which chooses democracy and freedom will never be an empire. It will never be “a big brother” or a “younger brother”. It will be equal among equals. It is short-sighted from a political point of view, immoral from an ethical point of view, and foolish from a man’s point of view, to waste time and cling to old dogmas and ideals that were and are preached by some.”

Boris Yeltsin (1992: 4), after the coup attempt in 1991

In Russia, an institutional vacuum followed the collapse of the Soviet Union. The weak institutions facilitated development of internal power struggle between competing elites. The unpredictable institutional structure of the state contributed to a political environment where confrontation instead of cooperation became the norm.

4.1 Institutional development in Russia

The democratization process in Russia was more complicated than in many other countries, since it came simultaneously with the building of a new state structure and economic system. The power holders had been elected during the last years of Soviet rule. The processes starting before the fall of the Soviet Union, and the disintegration process itself, had a great impact on the institutionalization of the Russian state. The institutional vacuum was filled gradually and on an ad hoc basis. This thesis deals mainly with the elites and their opportunities to mobilize support, and will thus focus on institutional aspects which can explain the actions of the elite, as well as the development of conflicts between them. In particular, the analysis will take into account the disintegration of decision making institutions, and the following lack of power division between the executive and the legislative branch. The opening of the media environment which took place parallel to this will also be discussed. This does not mean that other institutions were irrelevant. In Snyder’s theory, both the sequence of institutionalization and the strength of the institutions that are introduced are central when explaining how conflict comes about.

Establishment of new institutions

During Soviet times power was institutionalized within the Communist Party, and its administrative center was located in the RSFSR (Sakwa, 2002: 16). Practically all power was in the hands of the Moscow-based elite, which consequently had a lot to loose from a decentralization of power. A typical trait of Soviet politics was that political authority traditionally was linked with persons instead of institutions, making the institutions functionally weak. In the political culture one had to circumvent the institutional channels, because personal authority and networks were far more important to influence policy making than the judicial basis of the institutions. Respect for the formal institutions was low among the elite, and this implied that the legitimacy of the new institutions was low to start out with. Informal structures and working patterns with roots in the old Soviet regime were functioning below the surface (Devold, 2000: 63). This helps explain not only why the institutional design Russia was so poorly taken care of by the politicians, but also why Yeltsin's government later, as we will see, could allow themselves to disregard the authority of the parliament.

Free parliamentary elections in the Soviet Republics in 1990 marked the end of the party monopoly of the Communist Party and opened the door to new political factions. The Communist party was the only party with a well-established organization. As a result 86 percent of the new deputies in the Russian parliament were from the Communist Party. The rest of the deputies in these elections were independent. Boris Yeltsin was made chair of the parliament, and immediately started working for the division of the Union into independent states ⁸ (White, et al., 1997: 31). 12 June 1990, the Russian legislature made its first declaration of state sovereignty (Sakwa, 2002: 17). After this, Russian law was given superiority over legislation passed on the union level of the state. The Russian parliament played a

⁸ Yeltsin had been deprived of his status in the Party in 1988 for criticizing the slowness of reforms. Running as an independent candidate in 1990, he received 80 percent of the votes from his home constituency Sverdlovsk, and the establishment of the Party could do little to prevent his return (Rose and Munro, 2002: 24).

vital role in the break-up of the Soviet Union and remained one of the power bases in the new Russian state. The other power base was the president, an office which was established on Yeltsin's initiative. In a popular referendum in March 1991 more than fifty million Russians voted in favor of his suggestion ⁹(White, et al., 1997: 76). In June Yeltsin was elected to the new post (Rose and Munro, 2002: 25).

The introduction of a presidency was constitutionally problematic, because according to the Russian constitution, the parliament was given ultimate authority. With the establishment of a president, the division of power between these two became unclear. The new Russian government operated under the constitution that was adopted in 1978. This constitution had, after more than three hundred amendments, become a self-contradictory document where both the legislative and executive branch had supreme state power (Rose and Munro, 2002: 26). The president was given extraordinary powers to issue decrees, but these were temporary and subject to approval by the parliament (Sakwa, 2002: 47). As the parliament had been elected in 1990, with a big Communist majority, there was considerable resistance against some of Yeltsin's policies. Yeltsin did not choose to dissolve parliament. Instead, he ruled extensively through presidential decrees to introduce new legislation and rules. Thus, even though the conservative fraction kept their parliamentary majority, they had little opportunities to overrule Yeltsin's decisions. According to Snyder's theory competing elites represent a problem in the early stages of democratization, if the roles of different institutions are not clearly separated and there are no mechanisms to deal with diverging opinions. Later on in the process the relationship between the president and the parliament became a catalyst for the elite struggle.

On 6 November 1991 Yeltsin issued a presidential decree which banned the Communist party in Russia (Sakwa, 2002: 102). This also led to disappearance of the most central decision-making institutions in Russia, such as the Politburo and the

⁹ 75.1 % of the total electorate participated in the referendum, and 69.9 % of the votes were cast in favour of the question: "Do you consider it necessary to introduce the post of RSFSR president, who would be elected by a republicwide popular vote?" (White, et al., 1997: 76)

Central Committee (Lieven, 1998: 95). All the major institutions of the Soviet state were discredited, with the partial exception of the military. The rule of law was weak and the courts lacked authority and independence. The absence of a clear demarcation between Soviet and Russian institutions gave rise to a dangerous vacuum of authority, and Russia in effect suffered from a form of dual power (Sakwa, 2002: 31-33). The challenge was to replace the old Soviet institutions with new ones. On 8 December 1991, the leaders of Russia, Belarus and Ukraine proclaimed the dissolution of the Soviet Union (Rose and Munro, 2002: 25). Russia became a sovereign state with two supreme powers – the parliament and the president.

Conflict between the president and the parliament

The reform government of Yeltsin continued to rule extensively through decrees in the first years of independence. In the economic sphere major reforms were undertaken from 1992. The command economy was to be replaced by a capitalistic one. The main architect behind the reforms was Yegor Gaidar, who later became the acting prime minister (Sakwa, 2002: 37). He wanted to pursue the type of ‘shock therapy’ other post-communist states, such as Poland, had gone through, but this had a major impact on the welfare of the population. Not only did prices sky rocket and salaries diminish, but the privatization processes favored the elite, and gave a small number of people the opportunity to gain a large share of former state assets. This also contributed to de-legitimize Yeltsin’s government. Those who managed to take over big business in Russia were mostly former members of the Communist party youth organization *Komsomol* (Remington, 2004: 161). They had climbed the hierarchy of the party structure and used their network and influence for personal gains - later they became known as the *oligarchs*. Political contacts helped them win crucial licenses and monopolies early in the post-communist period, and while the oligarchs could use financial means to influence politics, government officials could enrich themselves (Remington, 2004: 114). The oligarchs’ strong position weakened the political institutions even further. This in turn contributed to the population’s distrust both in the market system and in the new political regime. This way the economic dimension of the state-building process had impacts far beyond the

economic sphere. The struggle between the president and the parliament increased as the president pushed for an economic policy not approved by the legislature. The parliament tried to counter presidential decrees after the adoption of economic reforms in 1992, and unsuccessfully attempted to remove Yeltsin from office and impeach him. Several times parliament attempted to undermine Yeltsin's politics, for example by refusing to accept his proposals for the post of prime minister. Yeltsin, for his part, increasingly resorted to emergency measures because of what he saw as parliamentary obstruction of his reforms (White, et al., 1997: 78-81). At least for a while, he managed to keep the parliament at a distance. The immediate institutional problem was the absence of a constitution designed for the new state. The central government had not established itself before the onset of reforms. Snyder's theory emphasizes the sequencing of steps in the democratization process, where the establishment of a central government ideally comes before parties are introduced and elections are held. In relation to Russia, we see how the lack of constitutional clarity generated problems. The two branches of power distrusted one another, and discredited the other branch. Such a state of events hardly contribute to public confidence in the effectiveness of democratic institutions.

The internal conflict intensifies

In 1993 the latent conflict between the president and the parliament reached the surface, in what turned out to be a chaotic year for the Russian government. Both Yeltsin and the parliament used extreme measures to discredit the power of the other branch. Yeltsin was about to exhaust his possibilities to rule through decrees, and on 20 March, he announced the introduction by decree of a "special regime" of presidential rule, where the parliament would be unable to overrule whatever he and his government chose to adopt (White, et al., 1997: 79). The constitutional court overruled this decision as unconstitutional (RFE/RL, 20.03.1993). Yeltsin decided that a referendum on public confidence in the president and his socio-economic

policies was to be held in April.¹⁰ With a 64 percent turnout in the referendum the support for the president was not overwhelming (NUPI, 25.04.1993). The result was still interpreted as support for the government to go ahead with the new constitution. In his theory Snyder emphasizes the unwillingness of elites to give away control to other branches of power in a democratizing process. The referendum can be seen as a way for Yeltsin to circumvent the decision made by the constitutional court, and this action contributed to discrediting both the constitution and the constitutional court. This illustrates how weak institutions are dangerous, and how the elite can take advantage of institutional weakness to pursue their own interests. This in turn weakens the institutions even further.

The frictions between the president and the parliament continued during the process of mapping out a new constitution, and Yeltsin finally dissolved the parliament on 21 September 1993, calling for new elections in December. Again, the constitutional court ruled that there were grounds for impeachment, due to violation of constitutional clauses (Rose and Munro, 2002: 29). Yeltsin and his supporters argued that the constitution was a document of the Soviet period and that there was no other way of resolving the deadlock (White, et al., 1997: 92). Yet again, Yeltsin's actions served to undermine the legitimacy the constitutional court. This provoked a coup attempt by central figures in the parliament, such as Ruslan Khasbulatov and Alexander Rutskoi, who condemned Yeltsin's action as a "state coup" and voted for his dismissal (White, et al., 1997: 93). Demonstrations were arranged in support of the parliamentarians, who had barricaded themselves inside the White House, the building where the parliament was situated. They tried to start a national revolt against Yeltsin, but he used the military to take the power back, and the leaders of the rebellion were arrested (Remington, 2004: 55). According to the official report, 145 people were killed and more than 800 were wounded (White, et al., 1997: 94).

¹⁰ The referendum consisted of four questions: (1) Do you have confidence in the President of the Russian Federation, Boris Yeltsin?; (2) Do you approve of the socio-economic policies carried out by the president and government of the Russian Federation since 1992?; (3) Do you consider it necessary to hold early elections for the presidency of the Russian Federation?; (4) Do you consider it necessary to hold early elections for the people's deputies of the Russian Federation? (NUPI, 25.04.1993)

Yeltsin could continue his work for a referendum on the constitution and the election of a new parliament. It became apparent that mechanisms facilitating peaceful conflict resolution were missing. The deadlock between the president and the parliament resulted in a violent confrontation which further weakened the democratic institutions as well as the trust in these. Yeltsin's actions clearly show that he disregarded democratic institutions such as the parliament, the constitution and the constitutional court so as to avoid being overruled by the legislative branch. This is consistent with Snyder's theory, which claims that the elite will seek to manipulate weak institutions for its own gains.

In the December 1993 parliamentary elections Yeltsin sought to be "above" the conflict between parties, by not explicitly endorsing any one party (White, et al., 1997: 68). Consequently, none of the parties felt obliged to follow his course of action. The parties or electoral blocs that contested in the election were all very new. Half of them were founded earlier the same year; many were ad hoc alliances formed for the purpose of contesting in the elections, and only three dated from 1990, when political parties had been formally legalized (White, et al., 1997: 110). The democratically minded parties did not manage to unite in a single bloc, one main reason being disagreements over the constitution (Sakwa, 1995: 201).¹¹ The winners were the parties in opposition to Yeltsin's government, who won 39,5 % of the seats. The main parties in the opposition were the renewed Communist Party (CPRF) and the Liberal Democratic Party (LDPR). Both based their policy on a rejection of Yeltsin's government, and despite many differences in their programs, they managed to portray themselves as an alternative to the sitting government.

The constitution was subject to a referendum on the same day as the elections, after a long and hard struggle over its content. The opposition used the low turnout, which barely satisfied the legal requirement that half the electorate take part, to challenge

¹¹ Four parties competed for the position on the democratic side. These were Russia's choice (leader: Gaidar), Yabloko (leader: Yavlinsky), Party of Russian Unity and Accord (leader: Shakhrai) and Russian movement for Democratic Reforms (leaders: Popov, Sobchak, Yakovlev). Russia's Choice was the most successful of these, and also the party most supportive of Yeltsin's policies (Sakwa, 1995).

the validity of the constitution ¹² (Rose and Munro, 2002: 30). In addition, the president had called for a referendum, and this was against the procedures stated in the 1978 constitution. Some also questioned the authenticity of the voting figures (White, et al., 1997: 99). The constitution was adopted, but the chaotic and unruly process preceding the referendum contributed to a further weakening of trust in both the constitution itself, and in the branches it granted power to. In a survey, only 14 percent thought the new constitution would help establish a lawful and democratic Russian state, while 30 percent thought the opposite, and around half found it “difficult to say” ¹³ (White, et al., 1997: 101).

The division of power became clearer with the adoption of the new constitution. According to this document, power between the executive and the legislative branches is clearly separated, but the distribution of power is unequal. The constitution gave the president and the prime minister appointed by him a very central role, and the president had the authority to issue decrees without Duma approval (Rose and Munro, 2002: 110). In reality, this meant that there was a fundamental lack of checks and balances on the decision making process. The population did thus not have the opportunity to exercise pressure on the president through their elected representatives in parliament, because this branch could not effectively work as a counterbalance to the president. When the president later chose to go to war in Chechnya, this decision was not subject to approval by the parliament, because the decision was made in a presidential decree (NUPI, 11. December 1994).

The impact of the media

Finally, this chapter will describe how the marketplace of ideas influenced the political process in Russia. With *glasnost*, the space for freedom of speech increased

¹² 54.8 % of the electorate took part in the referendum. 58.4 % of the votes were cast in favour of the question: “Do you approve of the constitution of the Russian Federation?” (White, et al., 1997: 99)

¹³ The survey “New Russia Barometer III” was performed by Centre for the Study of Public Policy. It was conducted in early spring 1994, and interviewed large nationwide representative samples of the Russian population, 3,535 persons were interviewed (White, et al., 1997: 43)

substantially. Almost overnight the strict censorship disappeared, resulting in an overwhelming flow of all sorts of previously suppressed points of view, be they political, cultural or other. Freed from censorship, the new quality papers acted as a forum for debate of public issues (Sakwa, 2002: 332). A new diversity in the media developed after independence, and the number of central newspapers nearly doubled between 1991 and 1993. In the Soviet Union freedom of the press had not been protected legally, but in August 1990 a new media law was introduced, and in December 1991 Yeltsin signed a new Russian law on the media (Benn, 1996: 2). This opening of the marketplace of ideas was on the one hand a sign of democratization, because it allowed for a diversity of new opinions and ideologies to be expressed in the public space. On the other hand it allowed for intensified political competition and contributed to harden the fronts. Snyder's theory claims that an opened marketplace of ideas can contribute to the escalation of nationalist mobilization, but this was not the case in the earliest stages of Russian democratization. Despite full media freedom, nationalist demands were seldom articulated. This is probably related to the lack of a historical national identity, which will be discussed later on. The media did however play a significant role when the opposition decided to play the nationalist card in relation to the 1993 elections. The media had an enormous impact on public opinion, especially since the removal of censorship gave the public a reason to trust what was actually written.

In the early democratization phase independent media were supportive of Yeltsin's government and its challenge against the communist regime. The economic reforms were not well received, and soon the media started criticizing the new regime instead. The media criticism contributed heavily to Yeltsin's steep fall in popularity. Reinstating some control over the media became an important issue for Yeltsin. Before the 1993 parliamentary elections, the government was clearly pushing for media's support, and some papers were abolished if supporting others (Benn, 1996: 3). The battle for voters during election time was largely won through appeals to the public via media channels, in particular television, to which 95% of Russian households had access in 1993. The struggle for control over television was thus

central in the battle between the president and the parliament in 1993 (Benn, 1996: 475). The role of the media in influencing public opinion, particularly as regards support for candidates, seemed to contribute to the aggressive political environment at this stage. For example, Yeltsin's government used its control over national television to play down the influence of the nationalists, but this backfired when Zhirinovsky bought 220 minutes of airtime on the eve of elections (Kipp, 1994: 75). The success of Zhirinovsky's intensive pre-election campaign will be further discussed in the chapter on nationalist mobilization.

4.2 Elite competition in Russia

Snyder's theory indicates that competition between elites is dangerous in a democratization process, if the rules of the game are not defined. As demonstrated, the institutions that were built in Russia were weak and their interaction was characterized by frequent clashes of interests. The events leading up to the coup attempt and the parliamentary election in 1993 contributed to an extremely tense situation. The coup ended in a bloody battle between the different fractions. The decline of control over the federal subjects was also characteristic of this period, and political opponents of Yeltsin questioned his ability to protect the territorial integrity of the country. Elite competition between different political fractions in the wake of democratization created high pressure on the president to maintain order in Russia. This contributed heavily to a situation in which he was willing to apply violent means, and start a "short victorious war" to regain the popularity he had lost in the course of the last two years.

Division and continuity of the elites

Glasnost created new opportunities for elites to emerge and take power, and this allowed a reformist elite to organize and eventually take over power. The majority of the political elite had, however, received their training in the Communist Party, and had climbed the party ladder in order to gain influence in society. The Russian elite is

characterized by continuity, meaning that major parts had served in leading government positions under the previous Soviet regime (Kryshtanovskaya and White, 1996: 728). While continuity was characteristic at a personal level, new divisions emerged at the ideological level. A main divide emerged between the conservative elite, who wanted to keep the Union, and the reformist elite, who wanted to turn the political system into a democracy, and to divide the Union into sovereign states. Not surprisingly, the reformist elite, which opposed the old system and demanded political change and economic improvements, won a lot of support in the early stages of Russian independence. This meant that they did not need to make compromises with the old rulers to get access to powerful positions. The new Russian government did not attempt to make a pact with the former elite, both because of their massive popular support, and because the legal and institutional landscape they operated in was blurry (Lane, 1996: 545). McFaul (1997: 12) maintains that extremists on both sides prevented the communists and liberals from making a pact. In the long run, the absence of a pact at this stage made compromise difficult later on in the process.

The popularity of the reformist elite was solid and supported by large parts of the population, but it lasted only a short period. By 1993, parallel with the crisis of the government, Yeltsin's popularity fell steeply. The transformation of the economic system, which initially accounted for a significant part of the support for Yeltsin's government, had become deeply unpopular with ordinary Russians. At the end of February 1993, a poll was conducted to compare Yeltsin's popularity with that of Ruslan Khasbulatov, his successor as chair of the parliament. Of 1032 persons polled, 35 % favored the president, 12 % favored Khasbulatov, while 53 % favored none (FBIS-SOV-93-057, 26. March 1993). This signaled a demand for change, and through the chaotic period of 1993 the support for Yeltsin fell like a rock to the ground. Khasbulatov had previously supported Yeltsin and acted as a buffer against the opposing forces in parliament, but in the tense situation he had now turned against Yeltsin, making his position a lot weaker (NG, 12. March 1993). By fall 1994, polls showed that 70 percent of Russians were dissatisfied with Yeltsin's performance (Snyder, 2000: 236).

The opposition unites against the government

According to Snyder's theory, a threatened elite is willing to go to great lengths to secure its power base. In the course of only a few years, the new power elite in Russia had become a threatened elite. The events of 1993 demonstrate that this was the case. If Yeltsin had not felt threatened by the power of the parliament, he would probably not have dissolved it. In addition, Yeltsin, who had based his political takeover on liberalism, was now faced with the demands of the opposition to step down. Snyder claims that the elite in a democratizing state seldom will choose liberalism as its ideology, because it would entail true accountability to the electorate. Yeltsin's ideological choice looked good on the surface, but he did not manage to fully pursue this ideal. Thus he became trapped in his own policy. According to Snyder's theory a threatened elite will resort to extreme and desperate actions. Yeltsin's reactions towards parliament clearly illustrate his desperation. Yet, Yeltsin did not choose to turn to nationalist rhetoric in this situation. His political opponents were more active in raising a nationalist discourse, which we will see in the next chapter.

The oppositional elite consisted mainly of communists and nationalists. Growing discontent with the performance of the government gave rise to a rejectionist front. A common hostility against the new order, the break-up of the Soviet Union, the radical economic reforms and Yeltsin's style of leadership, was enough to unite them in opposition to the government (Sakwa, 2002: 47). The Communist Party (CPRF) had been re-registered in February 1993 with Gennady Zyuganov as leader, and had kept many supporters from Soviet times, especially in the old generation. Major parts of the ideology remained the same as well, but in addition the CPRF emphasized nationalist issues. Zyuganov was also forging a national front, aiming to unite left and right opposition (NG, 16 February 1993). CPRF, supported by the agrarian party, saw the 1993 parliamentary elections as illegal, but participated in order to "prevent the dictatorship from being legalized" (White, et al., 1997: 113). In a way, the CPRF was an old elite which managed to renew itself in the political process of 1993, and resurface as a new elite in opposition to the sitting government. The far right Liberal Democratic Party (LDPR), the first registered party in the Soviet Union, had an

organizational structure which allowed it to do well in the elections. Its leader Vladimir Zhirinovsky had demagogic skills which outmaneuvered most other politicians, and the party program was based on a rejection of the system as such, not only on the rejection of the political path taken by the democrats. The success of Zhirinovsky in the elections came as a surprise to the great majority of political commentators. Polls at the start of the campaign had given him a low turnout, this indicated that the campaigning had been extremely effective (Remington, 2004: 121). Within Snyder's theoretical framework, the LDPR fits the description of an upcoming elite which seizes the new opportunities for mobilization on a nationalist doctrine. CPRF and LDPR differed ideologically, but agreed on the rejection of Yeltsin's policies, and on the emphasis on Russia as a superior state in need to show strength. Their dominance in the parliament after the election pushed Yeltsin's policies in a new direction, as we will see below.

Yeltsin's government did not resort to nationalist rhetoric before the parliamentary elections. This issue was free for the opposition to take advantage of, as Yeltsin's government did not emphasize a distinct Russian identity. It was the opposition which managed to mobilize voters around nationalist claims. What is striking in the Russian case, is how the elections and the new nationalist discourse still pushed the government to move in a more patriotic direction.

Regional demands weaken governmental control

The government's lack of territorial control was another issue that triggered opposition. This issue was also an important factor behind the decision to go to war in Chechnya. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, there were voiced demands for more autonomy in several parts of the state. In 1990, Russia was still essentially a unitary state, run from Moscow with few inter-regional coalitions of any real significance. By 1994 it had developed into a highly asymmetrical federation, with Moscow engaged in extensive selective bargaining with subjects of the federation (Solnick, 1998: 67). This was largely due to pressure by local elites for more autonomy in the anarchic atmosphere which emerged. Without the Soviet institutions

for control of the regions, the government was left in a weak position. It seems that the federal policy towards the republics was ad hoc, and dependant on personalities of the leaders on the national and sub-national levels (Solnick, 1998). Tatarstan was one of the most persistent regions when it came to demands for autonomy. The leader Mintimer Shaimiyev pursued a tactic of offensive negotiations, which eventually led to a high degree of autonomy. In February 1994 Yeltsin signed a bilateral treaty with Tatarstan, and later with more subjects (Solnick, 1998: 66). Obviously, it was effective to negotiate with the center, because the government was weakly established at the time and willing to give in demands to avoid further territorial disintegration. With the signing of the agreement with Tatarstan, Chechnya remained the most acute territorial issue on the agenda for Russia, and parts of the government pushed forward for a military solution to this problem.

Changes in government after the elections

After the parliamentary elections, Yeltsin's position was increasingly threatened and he was ready to make drastic changes in order to defend his power base. Lapidus (1998: 17) claims that he was pushed to abandon his liberal image, supporters, and advisors in favor of a more nationalist and authoritarian strategy and greater reliance on hard-line political advisors. Yet his popularity continued to fall in 1994 and in September, 70 per cent of those polled disapproved of Yeltsin's performance. McFaul (1995) therefore claims:

“If Yeltsin was going to win reelection in June 1996, he had to act and talk more like Zhirinovsky and less like the "democrats." In other words, he had to adapt to the new reality, in which one fourth of the electorate supported a political party which was against his reforms and policies.”

Democratic-minded, market-oriented people were replaced by more nationalistic people, which made the government more “hawkish”. Several of these officials had been in Yeltsin's government from the beginning, but after the elections the influence of this coalition grew (McFaul, 1997: 28). The winning party of the elections, LDPR,

was not represented in the new government at all, and the government did not reflect the political parties in parliament. Still, the policies of the government were becoming more influenced by the issues put on the agenda during the elections. Consequently, Yeltsin's policies moved further away from the reformist direction he had taken earlier, and the gap between his advisors and the democratic parties widened (McFaul 1995). The most active proponents of a military solution of the Chechen problem were increasing their influence.¹⁴ This group is often referred to as the "Party of War", a name they were given by the liberal press in Russia, as it is assumed that they were the ones who advised Yeltsin to launch a military attack on Grozny (McFaul 1995). The liberal fractions of the government argued against using military means, but had lost a lot of influence.¹⁵ Yegor Gaidar resigned in January 1994, due to the lack of support for his economic policy in the new parliament (NG, 18 January 1994). Boris Fyodorov also resigned from the government after the elections, thereby effectively showing that the democrats were about to lose their position in government (McFaul, 1995). The major changes in the configuration of Yeltsin's government in 1994 prompted a shift in policy toward Chechnya (Lapidus, 1998: 17). In November 1994 the Russian Security Council held a secret meeting in which they ratified the decision already taken by President Yeltsin to utilize Russian military forces to subdue Chechnya (Lapidus, 1998: 19).

Here we clearly see how the divide between competing elites, which established itself at the very beginning of the democratization process, became an obstacle for the Yeltsin government later in the process. It was perhaps the lack of compromise early in the process which made the conservative fraction so determinant to undermine his policies. Still, this does not fully explain the emergence of the extreme nationalists in the 1993 elections, as this elite was fairly new in the political landscape. To

¹⁴ These were Defense Minister Pavel Grachev, Federal Counterintelligence Service (former KGB) head Sergei Stepashin, First Deputy Prime Minister Oleg Soskovets, Deputy Prime Minister Nikolai Yegorov, Security Council secretary Oleg Lobov, and Alexander Korzhakov, head of Yeltsin's personal security (McFaul, 1995)

¹⁵ These were for example prime minister Victor Chernomyrdin, first deputy prime minister Anatoly Chubais, Yeltsin's chief of staff Sergei Filatov and the presidential advisors Baturin, Kostikov and Satarov (McFaul, 1995)

understand how Zhirinovsky and the LDPR could receive the highest share of the votes in the elections, we also need to take into account the rhetoric of nationalism, which they successfully managed to introduce into the political discourse. In turn, Yeltsin also became more nationalist-minded, but without engaging in the nationalist public discourse. The decision to intervene in Chechnya was instead his contribution to win back the nationalists in the population.

4.3 Nationalist mobilization in Russia

As we have seen, nationalist mobilization was not a central issue in the very beginning of the democratization process in Russia, rather liberalism and regime change were important. This is probably related to the historical lack of a national identity in Russia. Before the 1993 elections, oppositional elites managed to make nationalism an issue. Both the CPRF and the LDPR were active in this patriotic discourse. This made Yeltsin turn to a tougher patriotic policy, and more inclined to use force. Snyder does not emphasize the level of development of the national identity in his theory. Since the two parties of the war differ significantly in this respect, a discussion of this aspect will still be included here. I will below substantiate the claim that Russia historically lacks a national identity, and describe how nationalism yet became a political issue before the war in Chechnya.

Lack of a historical national identity

Russia did not experience the kind of national revolution which occurred in several European states in the 18th and 19th centuries, something historians mainly attribute to the lack of a bourgeoisie, low social mobility, a lack of liberalization and late industrialization and modernization (See for example Kolstø, 1999: 47; Tolz, 2001: 34). Russia has been the center of an empire, and has not been a nation state of its own. In line with Gellner's theory, the lack of industrialization was particularly important in this regard – the need for a common identity simply did not emerge, as the rulers did not have the acute need to attach the population to the state. Peter the

great introduced a number of reforms aimed at modernizing Russia in the 18th century, and this provoked protest reactions from the intellectuals against what was seen as “Europeanization” of the country, threatening cultural traits such as the Orthodox Church. If there were attempts at nation building, these were made by the intellectuals, and not by those in power. An important divide existed between the so-called Slavophiles and the Westernizers, and the debate evolved mainly around how Russia differs from Western culture. Later, this debate has been re-evoked in attempts to separate the Russian identity from Europe (Tolz, 2001).

At the beginning of the 20th century European nation states were actively promoting their national identities. In Russia, however, attempts at building a separate Russian identity were practically non-existing. The territorial division of the Soviet Union was based on ethnic criteria, and the titular nations were given certain advantages within their territory. While local culture and language in this way was nurtured in other republics, no attempts were made to separate the Russian identity from the Soviet identity. Instead, Russia was the core area of the Union, and the main source of the Union-identity (Brubaker, 1994). As a result, Russian national identity remains an object of discussion, and a distinct national identity to replace the Soviet identity has not yet emerged. A nation is in a strictly theoretical sense built around a set of exclusionary traits which separate the members clearly from other peoples. This is simply not sufficiently established in Russia. This can explain why national demands did not dominate the discourses and independence movements in Russia, like they did in other parts of the Union.

When the reformists took over power in Russia, they tried to build a civic identity which could replace the traditional loyalty to Soviet symbols. This was part of the strategy to win popular support, since the majority of the population was tired of Soviet references. Government positions were used to open public debate and increase political participation, but not to nurture a national identity. The reformist government of Yeltsin wanted to build a civic identity, which was a new thing in Russia. The concept “Rossiiskiy” (Российский) was brought forward, intending to be an identity all citizens of Russia could share, determined mainly by their

relationship to the state and almost stripped of cultural references. The political opponents, on the other hand, were more active in making use of nationalist slogans in their argumentation. This was especially the case before the 1993 elections, when Yeltsin's popularity was in sharp decline. The opposition emphasized patriotism and the rights of the Russian nation, rights which Yeltsin according to his opponents did not protect. One could argue that while the opposition claimed to protect the Russian national identity, this was not a national identity in a strict sense, but rather an imperial identity. Their argumentation was still informed by the idea of separating people into 'us' and 'them' categories, thereby constructing outside threats.

The opposition uses nationalist rhetoric

According to Vera Tolz (2001) three main visions of the Russian identity were nurtured by the opposition: a Union identity, based on the borders of the Soviet Union, a Slavic identity, based on a cultural and linguistic unity with other Slavic people, and a linguistic identity, which more strictly limits the identity on basis of the Russian language. The CPRF drew lines back to the Soviet Union in their patriotism. Zyuganov argued that the Russian empire and the Soviet Union constituted a unique Russian civilization, and combined this with the simultaneous belief that the Russian identity is actually a Slavic one. The party, in its use of symbols and its appeal to common values to unite the people, mixed those of the Soviet period (such as the red flag) with those of the Russian empire, which have an appeal only to ethnic Russians (Tolz, 2001: 257). This way, they sought to reproduce the Soviet identity in a Russian form. An ethnocentric understanding of the word Russian – “Russkij” (Русский), was emphasized by this party, along with other Russian nationalists. In his election program Zyuganov emphasized nationalism and sought to distance his party from communist ideals and to present it as a reformed social democratic party. The nationalist political rhetoric of 'us' and 'them', the patriots and defenders of a sovereign Russian Empire on the one hand, and 'bandits' and enemies of the state on the other, was also taken in. The communists became the spokesmen of a broad opposition front which dubbed itself the “Russian resistance” (Русское сопротивление) (Flikke, 1999: 278).

The position of ultra-nationalists like Vladimir Zhirinovsky was similar to that of Zyuganov, in other words a mixture of the three main above-mentioned identities (Tolz, 2001: 257). Zhirinovsky emphasized the superiority of the Russian nation, and actively created hate images of other groups. He promoted an extreme nationalist position, where both anti-Semitism and an aggressive foreign policy were ingredients. Before the 1993 elections he managed to appeal to the fear of the disintegration of Russia, and the damaged self-esteem of Russians after the fall of the empire. He was presented as a man of the people, who understood their suffering and longing (Kipp, 1994: 86). Zhirinovsky posited that the Russian empire was not a luxury but a means of national survival “Russians everywhere become a national minority, gradually being destroyed. This will be the slow murder of the Russian nation. Because nowhere is there purely Russian territory, nowhere...If we follow such a path, then the Russian nation will die.” He warned that denying Russia its historical borders would lead to war. Thus the mere acceptance of the dissolution of the Soviet Union was an act of treason (Kipp, 1994: 77). In addition to the disapproval of the breakup of the Union, Zhirinovsky criticized the democratization process and claimed that it had created an inefficient and unmanageable system. Russian sovereignty and authority had to remain unchallenged, and he actively referred to outside (or inside) enemies, attempting to undermine the rights of Russia: “For us the main [point] is the territory of our state. Return to us the historical borders and name of the state – we only want that!” (ibid). Zhirinovsky announced that a democratic system was not what Russia needed, a strong president with a wide mandate would be more efficient to remake Russia a superpower on the world stage. He rejected the federalist system with too much separation of powers: “What is needed is a strict, centralized authority, otherwise no reforms will be achieved. There must be one state, one president. But without a centralized economy.”(ibid) . Supporters of the LDPR policy opposed the idea of a territorial state in which citizenship is a function of residence, and thus rejected a civic state in favor of an ethnic state. LDPR ideologues understood the force of such ideas in the struggle for power (Kipp, 1994: 78).

To understand why the oppositional forces in Russian politics were so successful in mobilizing around nationalism before the 1993 election, one needs to take into consideration that the sitting government had not appealed to national identity. As mentioned, they instead emphasized a civic identity. Hence, the table was open for others to use the nationalist card, and the opposition took the opportunity at a time when Yeltsin's popularity was falling. Opposition leaders devoted much more space in their writings and public speeches to the question of what the Russian nation is than president Yeltsin and his supporters in the executive branch of the government had done. The CPRF even set up analytical centers to produce 'general theories' about Russia's post-communist nation-building. The opposition also exercised a strong influence upon the positions on nation-building taken by members of executive branch (Tolz, 2001: 259). Political competition was what brought the debate about national identity into the public sphere. A nationwide, public debate about the contents of the Russian nation did not emerge, the discourse was fairly limited within political and academic circles. Recall Nordlinger's theory, which argues that democratization is more successful if the population can adhere to a common national identity before the onset of institutionalization. In Russia's case competitive elections were introduced before the establishment of a common identity, and this meant that the identity was "up for grabs".

Yeltsin did not himself engage in the national discourse, but it seemed like he was moving his policies in a more patriotic direction. Tolz (2001: 259) argues that the shifts in Yeltsin's perception of the Russian nation usually came as a reaction to pressure from the opposition. The war can be interpreted as his contribution to the discourse on national claims. By applying heavy force against a seceding republic threatening the territorial integrity of Russia, he was perhaps aiming to win back the votes of those supporting the nationalist opposition in the previous elections. Michael McFaul (1995) puts it like this: "Yeltsin did not order his troops into Chechnya to save the Russian Federation. He moved against Chechnya to save his presidency."

4.4 Discussion of findings

The political developments in Russia after the breakdown of the Soviet Union lead to a situation in which the government was willing to use military force to solve a territorial conflict. This analysis shows that the democratization process was an element contributing to this outcome.

The political liberalization started already during the Soviet Union, before democratic institutions were introduced. In the typology of Nordlinger (1968), we can say that Russia did not follow a fruitful sequence of political change. The development of a national identity did not precede the establishment of a central government, which in turn did not precede the introduction of mass suffrage. The process of change happened very quickly, beginning with increased press freedom and freedom of association, before the introduction of mass suffrage and formation of political parties. Only after this came the institutionalization of the central government with the adoption of a constitution in 1993. The development of institutions was, meanwhile, to a large extent dependant on the personal influence of different power holders, rather than on the institutions they represented. The power struggle between the executive and the legislative in particular contributed to an environment which led to confrontations instead of cooperation. The lack of a pact between competing elites early in the process might explain why this struggle became so intense in 1993. Mechanisms to deal with diverging opinions were not sufficiently in place, and the president could solve any disagreement with the parliament by issuing decrees. This created a situation where the president had a high degree of autonomy in decision making processes. The lack of clear power divisions and a weak legal framework made elite friction emerge. The actions of the elites in connection with the elections and the coup attempt in 1993, in addition to the chaotic process leading to the adoption of the constitution, undermined the ability of the institutions to serve as channels for expression of the popular will. This led to a weakening of several of the institutions. The decision to go to war could thus be made by the president single-handedly, without consulting the popularly elected parliament. This lack of effective

checks and balances on the executive branch of power was decisive, and it resulted from the insufficient democratization process.

Elections held in an atmosphere of desperate power seeking contributed to the nationalistic turn in Russian politics. It must, however, be underlined that no massive nationalist mobilization took place. The lack of nation building by the post-Soviet government was used extensively by the opposition to get votes and to discredit Yeltsin's rule. With an almost anarchic marketplace of ideas, competition for attention and support escalated. This provoked extreme opinions to reach the surface. The lack of prior nation building in Russia meant that the elite could choose from a range of different interpretations of the nation, and emphasize the aspects which would mobilize more voters in their favor. The fact that Zhirinovskiy and Zyuganov came from two parties with very different ideologies did not prevent them from uniting around the image of Russia as a strong state. The tactic of Yeltsin's government to emphasize a civic identity was clearly not as popular among the voters. Nationalist issues were put on the agenda during democratic elections, thus they had an indirect impact on the decision to wage war. It seems, however, like Snyder misses out on a central aspect of the effect of nationalist rhetoric – it does in fact matter if the national identity is established or not prior to the democratization process. This is not taken into account in the theory, but this analysis shows that the lack of an established national identity prevented the issue from dominating the public discourse.

It was not the threatened elite which put nationalism on the political agenda, rather it was the oppositional elite who used it to get support. When Yeltsin saw that this tactic was popular with the voters, he changed his own policies, not by participating in the discourse, but by changing the composition of government, and thus moving his policies in a more hard-line, patriotic direction. His reaction to the threat posed by the opposition was thus to adopt a strategy which was more similar to the political goals of the nationalist opposition, and less similar to his own liberal position. It seems obvious that the internal changes within government came as a result of the elections, and the need for Yeltsin to show muscles.

After the relationship with Tatarstan had been decided with a treaty, Chechnya remained the most problematic region for Russia to deal with. It seems like Yeltsin's new entourage persuaded him that a military attack would be a clever move in this situation, and that this made him more prone to accept the use of military force. The decision to wage war on Chechnya could thus be defended by a determination "to protect the Russian territorial integrity." No institutional mechanisms had been established to deal with conflicts between the central government and the regions. Other means, such as negotiations, had been used in other regions to stabilize frictions and to achieve territorial integrity, but these were ad hoc and not permanent institutions. Institutions which could have mediated or served as buffers between the leaderships of Russia and Chechnya were absent, and the consequence was that their differences of opinion became too immense to manage. Instead Yeltsin reached for extreme measures.

The real motivation behind the war was thus more likely the desire to win voters in the next round of presidential elections. According to Snyder (2000: 51) the first problem the nationalist elites face is to create a possibility for effective collective action on a national scale. Yeltsin tried to use the war in Chechnya as a national project of this type, to regain support from the Russian population.¹⁶ The failure of this attempt is obvious today, but that doesn't prevent this from being the motivation. The democratization process did not prevent the outbreak of war. Rather it encouraged conflict.

¹⁶ McFaul (1997: 31) writes that one could, following Snyder's theoretical assumptions, expect these developments in Russia to lead to the outbreak of an international war, which they did not. He criticizes Snyder's theory on this basis, and claims that the theory does not hold. Russia had other motivations to avoid war with another country which falls outside the theory, such as economic dependency. Yet, he agrees with Snyder that the incomplete democratization process was one of the reasons why Russia waged war in Chechnya, and that the war probably would not have occurred if Russia was a consolidated democracy. His account therefore supports the assumptions made in this thesis.

5. The Chechen side

“How are we going to construct our state? There are, of course, international laws, but without taking into account our national interests we will never reach full democracy, never become unified, and never be protected as individual citizens. (...) If our actions are condemned as illegal by international law, we shall correct our mistakes. Within ourselves we will find the strength to follow the road to democracy.”

Dzhokhar Dudayev (1992)

In Chechnya, the early democratization process allowed organizations to develop, and the marketplace of ideas opened for national issues to be publicized. The elites successfully took advantage of this, something they could do because a national identity already was established. The democratization and state-building efforts stagnated early in the 1990s, and democratic institutions were not functioning. Elite tensions contributed to further radicalization of the public debate.

5.1 Institutional development in Chechnya

In Chechnya like in the rest of Russia, the period following *glasnost* was characterized by the emergence of popular movements and the introduction of freedom of speech. The press started to criticize the authorities, and religion was no longer banned. Unlike in Moscow, where mobilization was primarily politically based, the Chechens demanded respect for their local culture and historical heritage in addition to democratic institutions. Those who put forward such national claims were in opposition to the communist party, which was soon marginalized in Chechnya. In 1989 the first ethnic Chechen, Doku Zavgaev, was appointed head of the local branch of the communist party (Gall and De Waal, 1997: 80). The decision to install him came as a reaction to the demands for more local power in Chechnya, but he was against the division of the Union into sovereign states, and supported Gorbachev's attempts to reform the Union. Many representatives of the intellectual and political elite of Russia stimulated and supported the Chechen demands for sovereignty (Tishkov, 1997: 225). The liberals supported the new claims for

sovereignty on an ethnic basis, as this legitimized their own fight for the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Chechnya's national independence was thus prepared and legitimized partly by Russian ideology and political practice in this period. Yeltsin even encouraged local elites to "take all the sovereignty you can swallow", motivated by firm belief in a deconstruction of the union into democratic states (Lapidus, 1998: 12). This was part of the reason why Russia did not interfere heavily in 1990. The new Chechen elite, however, went much further in their demands for autonomy than what Yeltsin had anticipated.

The Chechen Revolution

The Popular Front, which was established in 1988, had orchestrated the first protests against Soviet rule, but had moderate aims (Lieven, 1998: 57). The Popular Front disintegrated in 1990, and instead more radical political parties started to develop (Wilhelmsen, 1999: 53). Some of them were based on a Muslim identity. The Vainakh Democratic party, led by Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev, was the first party with branches in almost every village ¹⁷(Gall and De Waal, 1997: 91). Snyder claims that unconditional freedom of public debate in newly democratizing countries gives an opportunity to populist myth makers to take control of the public discourse, which can serve to strengthen nationalist attitudes in the population. In Chechnya, the opening of the marketplace of ideas allowed a flow of previously hidden information to reach the public. The fight for independence was a main topic in the public sphere, and incidents from the deportation were for the first time discussed publicly. One example was the Khaibakh massacre, where several hundred women, children, elderly and sick people considered be too weak to travel the long distance to Kazakhstan, were burnt alive inside a barn. Material about Khaibakh was published for the first time in Grozny in 1989 (Gall and De Waal, 1997: 64-68). ¹⁸ The

¹⁷ Vainakh is a common name for the Chechens and the Ingush, and are said to be the ancestors of a lot of ethnic groups in North Caucasus (Lieven, 1998: 59).

¹⁸ Information about this episode was hidden in Soviet times, but has later been documented interviews with survivors. See for example <http://www.tjetjenien.dk/deportation/khaibakh.html>, http://iwpr.net/?p=crs&s=f&o=161583&apc_state=hruicrs2004

increased focus on the deportation, and appeals to the injured collective dignity of the Chechen people, led to a massive mobilization around Chechen nationalism.

In the summer of 1990 a group of Chechens, led by the businessman Lechi Umkhayev, organized the Chechen National Congress (From now on referred to as the Congress). With this move the construction of Chechnya as an autonomous entity had begun. The goal was to unite different nationalist groups in order to put pressure on the local leadership to claim more autonomy (Gall and De Waal, 1997: 82-82). Around 1000 delegates, both from Chechnya and from the Chechen diaspora, took part when the Congress met in November 1990. A new political figure emerged on stage at the Congress - Dzhokhar Dudayev, who had never lived in Chechnya, but was an ethnic Chechen and a former general of the Soviet air force. As a member of a relatively small and insignificant teip, and as a man who had always lived outside Chechnya, he was a good compromise candidate for the representatives of larger, rival clans, followings and interest groups in the Congress, and he was elected leader at its first assembly (Lieven, 1998: 58). The Congress was an ad hoc institution, but aside from some protests by the Communist party, it was seen as uncontroversial in the Chechen population. It managed to pressure the Supreme Soviet in Chechnya to declare independence in November 1990. This first declaration was not unique, as many other regions of Russia made similar statements in this period, but it permitted the Chechens to denounce decisions from the centre which contradicted local interests (Wilhelmsen, 1999: 53). Snyder writes about how new democratic institutions in the beginning usually are too weak to replace institutions of the previous regime, because each group is taking care of its own interests, without sufficient power or motive to take into consideration the outcome for society as a whole. In the longer run, the fragile unity of the coalition in the Congress made this institution weak.

Dudayev takes power

Dudayev aimed to turn the Congress into a radical political movement. After its second assembly in June 1991, radicals made up the majority (Gall and De Waal,

1997: 92). By autumn the Congress had taken over the power of Chechnya. The Supreme Soviet was discredited and had lost legitimacy early in the process. It had minimal impact on later political developments in Chechnya. A clear illustration of this is that Zavgaev was in Moscow during the August 1991 coup, and did not condemn it or make any public statement, while Dudayev immediately organized protests that turned into a huge and militant crowd. In September Zavgayev was physically forced to sign an 'act of abdication' (Gall and De Waal, 1997: 93-96). The passivity of the Communist party allowed the new elite to hijack the political sphere and they were supported by the population. The Congress was thus entirely in charge of the presidential and parliamentary elections held in October 1991. Dudayev won against three opponents, who were without credibility ¹⁹ (Gall and De Waal, 1997: 98). Nationalist groups captured all the seats in the parliamentary elections (Lieven, 1998: 63). The installation of the new regime in Chechnya happened dramatically, but gave Dudayev authority. This process reflects how the new elite took advantage of the weak institutional framework to come to power. Their will to actually follow democratic rules was not very strong later in the process. In a sense, the establishment of central government came early in Chechnya, but the actors in the process could only cooperate as long as they had a common enemy to struggle against. It was the power holders themselves who had constructed the institutions. In Snyder's theory this point of departure is dangerous because it leaves the institutions open for manipulation.

Autonomy, but no authority

On 1 November 1991 Dudayev stated in his first decree as president that Chechnya was an independent state, and this time the declaration appeared more of a threat against Russian territorial integrity. The Russian government consequently declared a state emergency in Chechnya. At this stage Dudayev and the parliament stood united

¹⁹ At this stage, Ruslan Khasbulatov, the ethnic Chechen speaker of the Russian Duma, supported Dudayev in taking over power (Gall and De Waal, 1997: 96). This is interesting to note in light of later developments of the relationship between these two. As we will see later, Khasbulatov came back to challenge Dudayev's power base in 1994

against Russian demands. The parliament met in an emergency session and granted Dudayev the mandate to 'defend the sovereignty of Chechnya'. He started to mobilize fighters, and was inaugurated as president the next day (Gall and De Waal, 1997: 101). The Russians agreed to pull their troops out, and no confrontation occurred at this stage, something Russian policy makers have regretted in retrospect. An intervention at this stage could have been more effective for the Russians, since the Chechens had not had much time to mobilize militarily. Huge amounts of weaponry were now left behind by the Russian forces, and Dudayev's forces managed to seize most of the weapons as the troops withdrew. The Chechens could also buy weapons from corrupt Russian troops on the black market (Gall and De Waal, 1997: 113). The arming of the supporters of secession was, however, a process not always controlled by Dudayev himself (Tishkov, 1997: 207). Later, when local military groupings began to arise, they were armed with these weapons. The government had no control over the distribution of these weapons, and this clearly illustrates how institutional weaknesses facilitate violent conflict.

In 1992 there were some modest attempts at building a Chechen state. The parliament proved a lively debating chamber and the press was vigorous and uncensored. The problem was that Dudayev and others in the leadership seemed more interested in calling Chechnya independent than in the practical measures required to build a state. In addition to this, he wanted all economic power to remain with the state (Gall and De Waal, 1997: 106-107). Dudayev had given leading political positions to his aides from the revolution, which meant that these positions often were to secure gains such as control over money flows and not to promote political reforms. This did not increase the credibility of democratic institutions, but rather discredited them. Dudayev himself was in the beginning more of a front figure, but moved to a central position, and took more power than what he initially was given from the parliament. His group of aides consisted of a group of people who used their positions to gain weapons and money. This was later used to fight against Dudayev himself (Gall and De Waal, 1997: 108).

The chief ideologist of the Congress was Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev, who had also founded the Vainakh Democratic Party. Yaragi Mamodayev, a wealthy oil businessman with mafia links, became prime minister in Dudayev's government (Lieven, 1998: 59). Beslan Gantemirov was from the same teip as Mamodayev, and commanded his own paramilitary organization - Islamic path. He became the mayor of Grozny. Together with Mamodayev he was at the top of a criminal network. Yusup Soslambekov was also a businessman with suspicious links. In addition he was a born orator, and hence very useful in the mobilization of the population (Gall and De Waal, 1997: 92). Snyder's theory describes how elites not only take advantage of the weakness of institutions, but also deliberately weaken them in order to strengthen their own position. In Chechnya it seemed obvious from the start that some were more interested in personal gains than in the overall political development. By giving these persons leading posts in government, Dudayev not only weakened the ability of the state to introduce further democratic institutions. He also weakened the ability of the population to influence the decision making processes, such as the decision to mobilize violently against Russia.

A constitution was mapped out to secure a tripartite division of power, between a legislative, executive and judiciary branch. Dudayev continued to dominate the political arena, however, and the division of power did not function in practice. A report by the organization International Alert in October 1992 pointed to the widespread dissatisfaction with Dudayev's rule due to the lack of economic reform, his government's arbitrary politics, and lacking understanding for the necessity of opposition criticism and complexities of building democratic government (Tishkov, 1997: 208). In 1993, Chechnya was turning into a so-called failed state, in which the central authority cannot provide security to its citizens and lacks control over its territory and the administrative resources to keep its country running smoothly.²⁰ Instead, competing warlords and paramilitary groupings mobilized against the

²⁰ In their discussion of the term "failed state", Maass and Mephram(2004: 5) emphasize the lack of will or ability by the government to provide the citizens with basic goods and security, and they measure state failure along a continuum.

government, which in turn was highly dependant on the black economy instead of tax revenues. A combination of poor control by the government over weapon flows and a population tired of deteriorating living standards laid the basis for a violent mobilization against Dudayev. Gall and De Waal (1997: 106) describe the developing anarchic condition like this: “Chechnya was not so much an independent country as a twilight zone, neither inside Russia nor outside it (...) From the summer 1992 there were no Russian troops in the republic (...) Instead there were plenty of gunmen in camouflage who could have belonged to anyone, but appeared to be defending President Dudayev.” Snyder’s theory stresses that the combination of weak institutions and a population willing to mobilize creates a dangerous situation. In Chechnya, the flow of weapons further increased the potential for a violent conflict to erupt. Later we will see how Dudayev disregarded the parliament, and thus weakened the power of this branch. There was no institutional mechanism at work to prevent the executive from making decisions against the will of the parliament, and the situation resembled in this respect the situation in Russia. The lack of checks and balances on the power of the president was a major institutional weakness in Chechnya as well.

Low legitimacy of formal institutions

The new elite in Chechnya had problems establishing stable power institutions. One way of explaining this, is the weak authority of formal institutions in Chechnya, also during Soviet rule. The Chechens had maintained their traditional structures as relevant in decision making processes alongside, or even above, the formal Party structures. Teip membership ties a Chechen to a large extended family, almost like a clan, and to an ancestral piece of land. For a long time, this has been the main unit of identification for Chechens, and there are more than 150 teips in Chechnya (Gall and De Waal, 1997: 26-27). Chechen customary law, *adat*, governs the relationships within the teip, and has traditionally been an important element in organizing Chechen society (Mannes, 1998: 36). When the Soviet structures disappeared, these were more or less replaced with these traditional networks, although these structures have also developed over time. The point is that minimal emphasis was put on

introducing new, formal institutions. The teip structure also played a role in the competition between different elites by being the basis of the constituencies of different warlords. The role of the teip will be discussed further in the chapter on national mobilization.

5.2 Elite competition in Chechnya

The new elite consisted of a wide variety of different persons, representing different interests and opinions about the future of Chechnya. We have seen how they were united in the beginning. This put heavy pressure on the Supreme Soviet of the Communist party, which was soon removed from power. When Dudayev had consolidated his power however, the different fractions of the elite started to drift apart.

A fragmented elite

Dudayev did not tolerate any form of opposition to his rule, and made several attempts to remove actors in opposition to his rule from the political arena. He thus appeared as what Snyder terms a threatened elite. Especially in the period 1992-1993 his grip on power was weakened. The Russian government meanwhile held a low profile towards Chechnya and did not interfere. Instead it closed all communication, except oil transport, making the economic situation in Chechnya extremely difficult. Dudayev attempted to get international recognition for Chechnya as an independent state, but despite meetings with numerous high-ranking officials he did not succeed. The first serious challenge to Dudayev's rule came in March 1992, when armed men tried to take over the television centre in Grozny (Gall and De Waal, 1997: 110-114). When the parliament called for a referendum to decide the form of power in June 1992, Dudayev dissolved it and introduced direct presidential rule (Tishkov, 1997: 208). This illustrates how the elite not only took advantage of the institutions, but also consciously weakened them. Dudayev had emerged as part of a new and successful elite, but when his position became threatened, he had to change tactics.

Snyder's claim that elite competition is dangerous when the institutions are weakly established thus fits well with the development in Chechnya.

By 1993 the previously united elite had divided into fractions, most of them in opposition to Dudayev. After the opposition had entered into politics, the Chechen conflict acquired an internal dimension in addition to the external one. Sporadic internal clashes threatened to turn into a full-blown civil war and made the situation increasingly unstable (Trenin and Malashenko, 2004: 20). The elite split for different reasons, one of them being that they represented very different interests to start with. When Dudayev's government failed to produce economic improvements and other results, a general discontent spread in the elite. In turn this led to an explosive atmosphere, and because of the quantity of weapons available it was easy to mobilize the different groups. Dudayev was in a sense an 'outsider' in Chechen politics, competing with more established elites and teip leaders. As his government failed to produce the promised results, people turned to other leaders and warlords.

Dudayev loses his grip on power

In April 1993, a majority of parliamentary deputies appeared ready to support an impeachment motion against Dudayev, and the opposition launched a series of mass protests. Dudayev responded to the protests by declaring presidential curfew, dissolving the parliament and crushing the opposition by force (Lieven, 1998: 79). The constitutional court declared the dissolution unconstitutional, but Dudayev reacted by declaring the court itself dissolved (Trenin and Malashenko, 2004: 20). This is almost parallel with the events in Moscow, where Yeltsin also dissolved the parliament in an attempt to limit its influence. Dudayev undermined the legitimacy of both the parliament and the constitutional court in desperation to keep his position. By this stage, Dudayev had fallen out with most of the allies who had helped him to power, with the exception of Yandarbiyev. His other former co-revolutionaries Gantemirov, Mamodayev and Soslambekov had all joined the opposition (Lieven, 1998: 75). When this group abandoned Dudayev, he was left in a weak position, and became increasingly paranoid. Lieven (1998: 77) claims that parts of the Chechen

opposition had economic motivations for seeking compromise with Russia, and that they did not genuinely support a sovereign Chechen state. One reason for their opposition was that Dudayev rejected to sign a federation treaty with Russia. The Russian side made some half-hearted attempts at negotiation, but it seemed obvious that their primary goal was to oust Dudayev from power, and not to build equal relationship with the Chechens. Dudayev therefore stopped the negotiations and claimed that “no political agreements with Russia are possible!” (Gall and De Waal, 1997: 118).

The conflict between Dudayev and the opposition became increasingly serious in May 1993 when parliament removed Dudayev from office, and appointed Mamodayev the new prime minister (FBIS-SOV-93-091, 13 May 1993). Dudayev tried to regain his position, for example by appealing to elders in the teips, knowing that they had symbolic value for the population (Lieven, 1998: 343). The opposition wanted a referendum on 5 June 1993, but the day before Dudayev struck a violent attack, led by the radical fighter Shamil Basayev, where at least 17 people were killed (Gall and De Waal, 1997: 119-120). This was the first mass bloodshed in Chechnya, and from then onward most overt opposition to Dudayev was violent. Wilhelmsen (1999: 75) claims that the presence of an opposition pushed Dudayev in a more radical and nationalist direction than if his grip on power had been more permanent. The intense elite struggle and the lack of mechanisms to deal with opposing and diverging opinions thus contributed to Dudayev’s radicalization.²¹

Internal aggression turns into war

It was not only fragmentation of the government which made the power struggle in Chechnya more intense. Actors not previously involved in the political game also

²¹ Some choose to explain Dudayev’s actions as consequences of his personality. Dudayev was a military man, not a politician, and for him all signs of compromise with the enemy meant defeat. Explanations based on personal traits yet appear too simple to explain a very complex picture. But Dudayev’s personality certainly did not contribute to dampen the conflicts either.

tried to take advantage of the anarchic situation for own gains. In 1994, after some period of isolating Chechnya, the Russian government attempted to dampen the internal conflict in Chechnya by installing a Russia-friendly leader. Russia did not accept the Dudayev regime, but pursued a split-and-rule tactic to oust Dudayev from power. As the political and economic situation in Chechnya began to deteriorate in 1994, hard-line segments of the Russian leadership sought to exploit the growing political cleavages within Chechnya to vilify the “criminal regime” in Grozny, challenge the legitimacy of Dudayev’s rule, and unify opposition figures around a campaign to unseat him. Sergei Shakhrai was a leading advocate of the strategy of isolating Dudayev, he argued that the installation of a more Russia-friendly leader could settle the Chechens and discourage their attempts at independence. Umar Avturkhanov, who headed a provisional council, was given Moscow’s full support as “the only legitimate power structure in Chechnya” (Lapidus, 1998: 16-18). The northern part of Chechnya was in control of Avturkhanov, Soslambekov and Gantemirov at this stage, and they joined forces to take back Grozny as well (Trenin and Malashenko, 2004: 20). By interfering in the internal Chechen power struggle, Moscow thus contributed to an intensification of the conflict between different fractions. The former Soviet establishment in Chechnya was solidly against Dudayev, and they were increasingly joined by the intelligentsia (Lieven, 1998: 79). In addition, Ruslan Khasbulatov, the former speaker of the Russian Duma, who had fought his own battle with Yeltsin in Moscow, returned to Chechnya in 1994 and staged a massive campaign for support (Tishkov, 1997: 216). Khasbulatov had, despite helping Dudayev to power, later been frozen out by the Dudayev government (Gall and De Waal, 1997: 114).²² Ruslan Labazanov, who had been Dudayev’s bodyguard, broke with him in 1994, and provided armed protection for

²² Mannes (1998: 76) argues that if the Russian government had supported Khasbulatov’s bid for power, the Dudayev regime might have been peacefully toppled. Khasbulatov, unlike Dudayev, belonged to a well-respected teip, and his resistance against Yeltsin had made him very popular in his Chechen homeland. Support by Moscow was, however, extremely unlikely, as he at this point was viewed as a criminal because of the coup attempt in 1993. Such speculations are thus not very fruitful to elaborate on.

Khasbulatov instead (Lieven, 1998: 31). The fighting between the forces of Dudayev and Labazanov was particularly intense.

Compromise between the different fractions seemed very distant. The situation resembled civil war. Crime rates were high and political anarchy prevailed. Only when the Russians intervened to bring back order to the republic, the warlords decided to unite in the struggle against a common enemy. Dudayev chose a tactic to regain control which involved appeals to national claims. This was successful, and the popular support for him increased in the period immediately before the war (Wilhelmsen, 1999: 76). This is exactly what Snyder talks about: When the elite feels threatened, it becomes desperate to gather support, and tries to convince the population to follow its political direction. Dudayev was desperate to regain control. In this situation he needed to unify support for his cause and against a common enemy. Dudayev chose nationalism, and the split in the elite contributed to pushing him in a more radical direction. The temporary institutional framework which allowed Dudayev to come to power was not robust enough to prevent the negative consequences of divisions among the elite.

5.3 Nationalist mobilization in Chechnya

Unlike in Russia, the Chechens immediately turned to nationalist rhetoric during *glasnost*. Many of the organizations and papers that appeared in this period argued, as we have seen, for a revival of Chechen culture and habits. There were probably two motives behind the appeals to the national identity in Chechnya. On the one hand, the opening of society allowed nationalist issues to enter the public space, and some argue that suppressed Chechens used this opportunity to speak freely about their culture and history. On the other hand, the political elite could use this opportunity strategically, to better position themselves and their collaborators in the future struggle for power in the republic. This chapter deals mainly with the second group, without dismissing the first as insignificant. Dudayev actively used nationalist rhetoric to mobilize support. When he entered the political stage in the early 1990s,

the nationalist discourse was, however, well established. Dudayev chose to pursue this line of mobilization rather than to mobilize around other issues. This is thus an example of successful use of nationalist rhetoric.

A resistant nation

There is a huge number of small ethnic groups in the Caucasus. The primary loyalty of Chechens has traditionally been at the local level, and the mobilization of a national identity was formed in opposition to Russian offensives (Evangelista, 2002: 13). The identity is mainly built around the Chechens as a proud, but victimized people, willing to strike back against the Russians. The collective memory of deportation and suppression by the Russians is the most important component of Chechen national identity (Wilhelmsen, 1999: 72).

The Caucasian wars in the 18th and 19th centuries are frequently referred to by the nationalists. Dudayev did, for example, claim that “The bloody Caucasian wars have shown what a unified Chechen people is capable of when we are fighting for our freedom and independence” (Dudayev, 1992). Chechen culture values highly the ability to fight, and in traditional folklore those who dare to stand up against a stronger enemy are praised (Mannes, 1998: 89). Imam Shamil is a central figure for the Chechens, although he was an ethnic Avar, which is another North-Caucasian people, residing mostly in Dagestan. Legendary tales about how he defended Chechen soil against the Russian intruders have made him a hero in Chechen history and national myth. The events of the Caucasian wars were, however, not fully brought into a common Chechen identity until the deportation of 1944. This is because a widespread, conscious sense of belonging to a common nation probably evolved among the Chechens with the deportation. Before that it was more relevant for the Chechens to identify with the teip. The Chechen nation was in a way born as a result of the tactic that was meant to destroy it. The deportation is quite recent, and the oldest members of the population still have memories from that time. Many who were born in exile in Kazakhstan returned to Chechnya later, or kept strong bonds with their relatives. The teip structure did not disappear, but was rather strengthened

in this period. The preservation of strong teip structures and group identity was facilitated by the relatively low level of industrialization of the republic and the correspondingly low level of Russian settlement (Lapidus, 1998: 10). Lieven (1998: 342) argues that the teip has lost its significance, and that it plays only a very limited part in determining Chechen's political behavior. It seems likely that the teip was the glue keeping the Chechens together in the difficult years of the deportation, and thus was the building block of national unity. Gall and De Waal (1997: 74) write that "The collective anger about the deportation was the most emotive element in a rich brew of nationalism as the Chechens started to invent themselves as a nation". After the Second World War the Chechens were often portrayed by the authorities as betrayers and criminals. This strengthened the Chechen self image as a "punished people", and prepared the ground for the elite to mobilize around national claims.

Islam is an important element of Chechen nationalism, but its significance in the immediate post-Soviet period is often overestimated. In the early 1990s Islam did not in itself constitute a motivation for the anti-Russian rebellion (Radnitz, 2006: 246). Insofar as the Chechen independence struggle has taken on a religious coloring, this was mainly because Islam is seen, even by irreligious Chechens, as an integrated part of the national tradition and of the nation's past struggles against Russian domination (Lieven, 1998: 357). In Dudayev's pre-election program of October 1991 there is almost nothing about Islam or even about religion in general. It was only in the autumn of 1994 the rhetoric of Islam became insistent (Lieven, 1998: 363). As religion was basically seen as an integrated part of the Chechen nation, and not particularly addressed in the mobilization before the war, it will not be discussed more thoroughly here.

A constructed nation?

Tishkov (2004: 10) claims that the Chechens' cultural similarity to the rest of Russia's population, is far greater than what separates them. The Chechen national identity was almost "constructed" in the period of political mobilization of the late 1980s according to Tishkov. While the Chechens, like all ethnic groups within the

Soviet Union, became more conscious about their national identity with the disintegration of the Union, it is misleading to say that the Chechen nation was constructed in this period. It is more accurate to say that a common Chechen identity has evolved gradually, on basis of historical events, cultural traits and mobilization by elites. The constructivist view of Tishkov is shared by some, but this thesis argues in line with those who see a consistent pattern in the development of the Chechen nation, and tie it up with previous identities. Mannes (1998: 13) argues that common cultural traits were established already before the Soviet Union, and that a Chechen *ethnie*, a shared history and a sense of solidarity, was established before 1917. This observation is in line with Smith's interpretation of the nation.

Lieven (1998: 332) argues that Russia was the catalyst which set off the chemical reaction out of which the contemporary Chechen national identity ultimately developed: by trying to conquer the Chechens it thereby encouraged them to adopt institutions and strategies of resistance. Wilhelmsen (1999: 122) finds a pattern in the way Chechens have protested against the center – they have always responded with violent resistance. What differed in the late 1980s and early 1990s from earlier times, was the high degree of freedom of speech. This gave room for articulation and promotion of nationalistic demands. The media had not previously been used as an arena for nationalism, and now the potential for outreach to the public was enormous. The institutional changes which came with the democratization process laid the ground for a massive national mobilization in Chechnya. The nation was not created in the process of democratization, but had a solid foundation to build on, which in turn was taken advantage of by political actors.

Specific cultural and social qualities such as the language and historical memories have been emphasized and nourished by the nationalists after the fall of the Soviet Union, when the national identity flourished. In this respect the Chechen nation differs from the Russian nation, and this is in part the reason why the nationalist mobilization was so successful here. The Chechens had several clear historical events to mobilize around and the nation was latent already before the articulation of nationalism. Nationalism in the 1990s was used strategically. Yet, the nation as such

has strength beyond the ideological use of it, and is thus more robust than the Russian nation. Tishkov's argumentation is weak, because it confuses the Chechen nation and the post-Soviet Chechen nationalism. While the nationalism evolved with the political opening under Soviet Union, the development of the nation had started earlier.

Dudayev's argumentation

Dudayev and his forerunners had concentrated their mobilization around the idea of Chechens as a 'punished nation'.²³ *Glasnost* had released anger over the deportation, and Dudayev could continue to use this anger to mobilize (Wilhelmsen, 1999: 74). The extensive mobilization around nationalism was made possible by the opened marketplace of ideas, and would not have been possible before *glasnost*. Recall how Snyder in his theory emphasizes that nationalists often portray other nations as more threatening and more blameworthy for historic wrongs than they really are. The elite in Chechnya referred extensively to the deportation and other historical grievances in order to mobilize the population against Russia. This mobilization started before Dudayev entered the stage, but his entrance into politics marked a milestone in the history of the Chechen conflict. Tishkov (1997: 200) puts it like this: "Like any nationalism, Chechen nationalism needed a 'leader of the nation' to express its will and interests."

In one interview Dudayev said "There have always been difficult times for our people. Throughout our history, troubles have forced suffering upon us without fail. And I believe the heaviest time will come now." He went on to claim that democratization brings the right of secession for the Chechens, justifying the fight for independence: "It now appears that the prospects for development of democracy will allow us to (...) revive our culture and fantastic national customs." In another interview, he underlined the strength of the Chechen people to resist Russian

²³ The quotes by Dudayev used here are from a number of interviews and speeches Dudayev made in 1991, which are collected in a book (See Dudayev, 1992).

pressure: “We will win, because we are right, because the workers and the whole population follows us, and in this lies our strength, this is the source of invincibility for our people, going through massive transformations.” Dudayev frequently referred to the dream of independence, which he apparently had all his life, and shared with his fellow Chechens “All my conscious life I have dreamed of seeing an independent Chechen nation.” In another interview he said, referring to their historical struggle with the Russians and to speculations that Chechens are not capable of building their own state: “The Chechens know the price of freedom, and we are ready to start the work. We have the economic potential for this.” He was very clear on the role of the Russians – who in his view were constantly trying to undermine the peaceful attempts by the Chechens to take over power. In one interview commenting on the bad relationship between the Ingush and the Chechens he said “All conflicts between our brother nations evolve because Moscow provokes violent passions out of pure desire”. He also claimed that the Russians were preventing the Chechens from sorting out the differences in a peaceful manner “We could have gained power in the course of an hour, throwing out the Supreme Soviet and occupying their chairs. But we didn’t use methods of force. We wanted to come to power in a legal way. That’s why the process dragged out. We were practically forced to take power in the wrong way, to seize the legislature.”

Dudayev portrayed the Chechens as a unified and peaceful nation, willing to do almost anything in their fight for independence. The Russians, on the other hand, were portrayed as obstructing these peaceful attempts, and thereby forcing the Chechens to take to arms. As the war was approaching, his appeals to take up arms against the enemy were more frequent, and more desperate. Eventually, his rhetoric could be characterized by calls for war rather than by arguments for national freedom.

5.4 Discussion of findings

The period following the sudden political independence of Chechnya was characterized by poor leadership and a fragmented elite. The analysis shows that

events in the early democratization process contributed to the development of a situation where extreme nationalism was applied to mobilize against the Russian enemy.

The national mobilization came earlier and was stronger in Chechnya than in Russia, and the new elite moved quickly to fill the power-vacuum after the Soviet demise. The elite could use this to mobilize the population around national demands. Tensions among the elite emerged soon, however, and threatened to destroy the fragile unity which was based on the resistance against Russian rule. Democratization is a somewhat misleading term to use when describing the political developments in Chechnya after the fall of the Soviet Union. After a short while the institutionalization practically stagnated, and few signs of actual democratization were present. But in the beginning there was an opening of society, introduction of mass suffrage, freedom of speech and freedom of association. This was the point of departure for later political development. The early stage of democratization, combined with a weakly institutionalized state and internal strife, contributed to the development of circumstances under which a violent conflict was hard to prevent.

The political opening which came under *glasnost* prepared the ground for new elites to emerge in Chechnya, and for new views to be expressed through the media. In line with the assumptions made in Snyder's theory, this sudden opening of the marketplace of ideas permitted presentation of extreme views. The Chechens had a clear national identity to build on, and the new elite used nationalist rhetoric to mobilize in the early stages of democratization. Their focus was on national revival. The opening up of the marketplace of ideas was a prerequisite for the entrance of nationalist issues into public debate, but it would be incorrect to say that the new elite created the nationalist discourse. It is more precise to say that the new political elite took advantage of the nationalist discourse, and voiced demands which created certain expectations in the population. That way they could place themselves and their allies in a beneficial position when the distribution of power changed. The Chechen national identity was built on resistance against Russia from the beginning, and statements by Dudayev illustrate how he appealed to the will of Chechens to

strike back against the enemy. This rhetoric stipulated violent struggle as the only way to overcome the enemy, and Dudayev thus left himself with no other option than to use violence. No significant initiative was taken to negotiate with Russia, and one reason for this might be the extreme hate-image of Russia which was nurtured by Dudayev and other nationalists in the early democratization process.

As mentioned in the theory chapter, there are different theoretical views on nationalist mobilization in the wake of a democratization process. While Snyder claims that “elite persuasion” is what mainly pushes the nationalist issues into the public debate, Byman and Van Evera hold that the democratization process as such does not generate nationalist sentiments, but can contribute to their entrance into the public debate. It seems like this view is more appropriate to use for the Chechen case, since national sentiments were present in advance. Snyder’s approach is, however, not entirely misleading, because the efforts made by the elite did contribute to strengthening Chechen nationalism and intensifying its demands.

Different fractions of the new elite stood united in the Congress and in supporting Dudayev’s take-over. The coalition was fragile, however, and personal networks mattered more than formal power. Dudayev was supported by the nationalist-dominated parliament against their common Russian enemy. After Russia had pulled out its troops in 1992 it proved harder for the Chechen government to administer the process of state-building, despite their de facto independence in this period. Once the enemy was defeated, and the Russians lost interest in the situation in Chechnya, internal splits made Chechnya difficult to control. The political development after this had little to do with democratization, and more to do with desperate competition for power. As a threatened elite, Dudayev acted according to the theoretical assumptions made by Snyder. He desperately tried to outmaneuver other democratic institutions, and thus discredited them. His actions revealed that his ambitions were contrary to democratic ideals of power sharing and popular control over the executive branch. Both Dudayev and other members of the new elite did what they could to undermine the strength of the institutions, and secure their personal power base. Snyder’s theory

claims that elite competition will lead to a weakening, not strengthening, of democratic institutions. The lack of institutionalization of the regime and mechanisms dealing with diverging opinions led to a violent internal conflict. In turn, the violent mobilization was directed against the Russians. The resistance against a common enemy was what eventually could reunite the Chechens.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Results of the analysis

The political developments in Russia and Chechnya after independence were to a large extent shaped by events early in the democratization process. At the outset, it seemed like a more democratic system was emerging. In the long run, an environment was created in which a violent conflict could develop.

The opening of the marketplace of ideas during *glasnost* made it possible for all kinds of opinions to be voiced publicly. The public discourse in both Russia and Chechnya evolved around the opportunities for political change and democracy. Snyder's theory assumes that a rapid opening of the marketplace of ideas will lead to the emergence of extreme opinions in the public sphere. To some degree the analysis supports the theoretical assumption that nationalism emerges when elites compete without clear guidelines in a process of democratization, but the differing degree to which nationalist demands were brought into the discourse in Russia and Chechnya reflects two things. First, that a national identity was more clearly established in Chechnya than in Russia. Second, that the elite which emerged in Chechnya was more interested in using this national identity rhetorically. Thus the level to which national identity has been developed does matter, and it seems sensible to take this into account in the theoretical framework. It can be expected that the opening of the marketplace of ideas will give different results in a country where national identity is well established, than in a country where it is largely undefined or where the existing identity is multiethnic in character. Snyder seems to underestimate this factor when he underlines the potential for "elite persuasion". The elite in fact has much less opportunity to use nationalist rhetoric if national identity is weakly established, than if it is present before the onset of democratization. This has been demonstrated in the comparison of the Russian and Chechen democratization processes. However if the institutional framework is fragile, a weakly defined nation can be mobilized by

nationalist rhetoric. The level of development of national identity thus seems to have had an impact on the timing of its entrance into the public discourse, and not so much on its potential for impacting on policy making. The elite can exploit national identity to mobilize voters regardless of whether the identity is strong or weak. In Chechnya the nationalist rhetoric had a direct impact on the decision to go to war, because the nationalism was based on extremely negative images of Russia, and Dudayev's rhetoric left him with no other option than to confront the enemy violently. In Russia the influence of nationalism was indirect, as the major impact of nationalist rhetoric came with the 1993 elections, and the result of the elections was what that pushed Yeltsin's policies in a more patriotic direction. The lack of a common national identity was perhaps what discouraged the government from pursuing a nationalist line of mobilization, but in a longer perspective the nationalist discourse did influence the political decision-making in Russia as well.

Like Snyder suggests in his theory, elite competition in an environment of inadequate institutionalization quickly turned into confrontation in both Russia and Chechnya. Changes in the administrative structures happened fast, and the marketplace of ideas was used as an arena for intensification of elite competition. In Chechnya, the fragmented composition of the Congress led to intense elite competition soon after it had taken power. In Russia, the old elite retained some influence through the parliament, and the president tried to limit their influence by ad hoc ways of circumventing the existing institutions. In the end, the old elite could use their position in the parliament to try to undermine the government and their reforms, both through political channels and through the media. The sequence of institutionalization was thus an obstacle to a proper democratization process as the central government had not been established prior to freedom of speech and association.

Snyder points to the weakness of institutions in general, but in this analysis we have seen how the lack of a clear power division in both Russia and Chechnya was a particular weakness which intensified the conflict. Immediately after the fall of the Soviet Union the new elites in government had a solid power-base in both Russia and Chechnya. When the support for these elites diminished, they sought other means of

keeping power. In Russia, the lack of power division materialized in a strained relationship both between the parliament and the president, and between the center and the regions. This also led to a lack of mechanisms to deal with diverging opinions. While ad hoc solutions, such as presidential decrees, and selective bargaining with the regions did work for a limited period of time, these options were exhausted, and no proper mechanisms had been developed to take over their functions. The absence of institutions for the conduct of negotiations was critical in the relationship between Russia and Chechnya. If such institutions had been established, this could perhaps have prevented a full-scale war from breaking out. In addition, the negotiations Russia conducted with regions such as Tatarstan show that Chechnya did in fact have other options for dealing with the center in the pursuit of autonomy. These options were not taken advantage of by any of the parties, and this makes it appropriate to talk about the war as a “chosen confrontation”.

The personal power of the presidents seems to be important, because the persons sitting in these positions became more influential than the institutions they were supposed to represent. Non-democratic means of keeping power were exercised both in Russia and Chechnya when the opposition became stronger, and through their actions the executives discredited institutions such as the parliament and the constitutional court. Yeltsin tried to outmaneuver an oppositional parliament by dissolving it, and Dudayev used violence to suppress opposition when the once-friendly parliament turned against him. Both in Russia and Chechnya the presidents attempted to gain control by dismissing the parliament, but were instead pressured into accepting the increased influence of radical nationalism: Yeltsin because patriots gained substantial influence in the 1993 elections and Dudayev because he was challenged by various warlords, and used nationalism as a tool to win back support. Elites in opposition to the presidents were instrumental in pushing governmental policies in a radical direction. This illustrates how mechanisms for regulating disagreements between different actors were not sufficiently established, and how this had direct impact on the likelihood of violent behavior. In both places the executive gradually became more open to taking up arms against the other side.

There were no institutions to check the decisions made by the president, because the parliament had been discredited and thus did not play a significant role in the decision to go to war.

The differences between Russia and Chechnya in the democratization process were many. Russia managed to pursue state building, while Chechnya did not manage this task at all. Nationalist rhetoric was much more dominating in the public discourse in Chechnya than in Russia, for reasons discussed above. Yet, the analysis has demonstrated how similar mechanisms related to the democratization process contributed to creating the environment in which a violent conflict could occur.

6.2 Implications for this case

The outbreak of the first Russo-Chechen war cannot be understood without reference to the democratization process. Without the political opening and the consequences of this, an environment in which conflict was nurtured would not have developed. But this does not mean that democratization is essentially dangerous and should be avoided. On the contrary, democratization can bring about positive changes, most significantly in terms of more popular control over political decision makers – if the end result is a functioning democracy. But there are many pitfalls on the way, and this thesis demonstrates how they can result in the outbreak of war.

The significance of sequencing in institutional development must not be underestimated. Mikhail Gorbachev could have chosen a different path of democratization, for example by reorganizing the Communist Party structure before he introduced freedom of speech and assembly. Perhaps approaching the democratization process from another angle could have provided the political leadership with more control in the process, and the anarchic power competition that resulted could have been avoided. Gorbachev could also have chosen to involve international actors in his democratization efforts to a larger extent, for example by using advisors with a broad knowledge of democratization processes. These are

naturally only speculations, as it is impossible to say with any certainty how the outcome would have been if the process had been conducted differently. But the findings in this analysis suggest that a higher degree of control and knowledge of the mechanisms which operate during a democratization process would have been desirable in Russia and Chechnya.

What seems obvious is that the international society made a mistake when they, almost unanimously, applauded the political processes in the Soviet Union and Russia in an uncritical manner. Western countries supported Boris Yeltsin's regime mainly because they feared a communist backlash, and they did not understand the warning signs that his discrediting of the new democratic institutions entailed. They chose to support a man who called himself a democrat, without placing more demands on his behavior. International actors could at least have tried to influence the process, and not be satisfied by the mere holding of elections. The Russo-Chechen war came as a shock on the international society, but if they had followed the process more closely, they would probably not have been caught by surprise. With more involvement, the international society could perhaps even have helped avoid the war.

6.3 Implications for future democratization processes

As stated, the purpose of this thesis is not to draw conclusions regarding all cases similar to the one analyzed here. Some additional remarks will be made here as to how the results of this study can be used to further develop the theory of democratization and conflict.

Seeing how influential the democratization process was in this case, one must ask how democratization processes in the future can be better managed to avoid the potential outbreak of violent conflict. It is for example important that mechanisms for dealing with diverging opinions are created before the opening of a public space. The holding of elections at an early stage is not necessarily a positive thing, because they

can serve as vehicles for nationalist mobilization. One has no guarantee that the winner of the elections will live by the democratic rules of the game once installed. The previous power holders will typically be more interested in making provisions for their own return to power, while new power holders will be more interested in making provisions for keeping power than actually attempting to make a democratic form of governance work. It is therefore crucial to establish a balance of power between different institutions as early as possible, making it possible for them to check the behavior of other institutions, and for the population to exercise influence through the institutions. That being said, it is difficult to control a democratization process once it has begun. Even though one in retrospect can claim that steps were taken prematurely, it can be extremely difficult to change the order of development at the time. It is therefore important to start off the democratization process in a fruitful manner.

The lack of international involvement was characteristic of the Russian and Chechen democratization process. The international society should probably be more engaged in assisting new regimes in such processes. In major states, such as Russia, it can be difficult to exercise influence, but in smaller states pressure from the international society can be very effective. If outside actors can give advice on the process, and possibly offer guarantees which will decrease the conflict level, this can perhaps limit the ability of different elites to take advantage of weak institutions.

The lesson must thus be that democratization is not negative per se, but that the democratization process can have unfortunate consequences. The challenge for participants in future democratization processes is thus to convince the actors involved to choose other ways to solve disagreements than through violent confrontation.

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